

promoting quality public transport.....

CONFERENCE REPORT

**Thursday 24th October 2024, Winmarleigh House
 Conference kindly supported by Northern Trains**

1. Welcome and Introduction

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

David summarised the background to and work of the Railway Children charity. He said that normally all money raised today would go to support the work of TravelWatch. On this occasion all donations received would go towards the work of *Railway Children*.

David went on to say that public transport has become a veritable *curate's egg* – good and bad in parts and he gave examples, On the plus side -

- The introduction of brand new trains on the Mersey Rail network.
- The introduction of the Yorkshire Dales Explorer train to Ribbleshead.
- The £2 flat fare on buses.

On the minus side -

- The continuing failure of the railway industry to provide a consistent service which satisfies its customers.
- Lack of workable integration between bus and rail services.

Councillor Mo Hussain, the Deputy Mayor of Warrington welcomed everyone and expressed his appreciation of TOWNW's work. He emphasised the vitality of public transport and thanked everyone for their work supporting this cause. He stated his confidence that the discussions would lead to positive change.

2. Northern Trains

Owain Roberts, Regional Stakeholder Manager and Alberti Benson, Head of Trains and Stations

Owain outlined –

- Northern's vision and revenue growth with leisure an important aspect
- Working towards a 7-day railway

- The new trains programme which would include consultation with passenger groups.

Alberti explained the position with performance and the contribution of such factors as highest ever sickness levels and Sundays being voluntary. He outlined improvement priorities.

Owain summarised future plans and prospects including the December timetable changes, the Yorkshire Dales Explorer, the Bee Network (introduction of contactless payment and station branding), the Manchester and North West transformation programme (MNTP) and Trilink - a renewals programme on the West Coast Mainline between Crewe and Carlisle, including the renewal of the signalling systems and introducing ETCS.

Q&A

Ian Watson deplored the lack of late evening services on the Tyne Valley (A: Business case would be needed).

Trevor Bishop- how to stop train crews trained by Northern from moving on to other TOCs? (A: Being examined internally).

Roy Chapman – Too many trains on the Castlefield corridor. (A: MNP to tackle)

Adrian Swift - Lime Street shutdown and over reliance on Rest Day working. (A: Historic franchise agreements problem- DfT now supporting change).

John Owen - Short formed trains (Q: acknowledged, new trains 3/4 cars sets but some years off).

3. Warrington's Bus Network

Chris Hook, Interim Specialist Transport Services Manager

Chris gave some background and context. The BSIP included more bus services for Warrington, capped fares and investment in bus priority measures including Winwick Road. The ZEBRA scheme comprised a whole fleet and depot conversion for Warrington's Own Buses – 105 new electric buses.

A long-term Bus Shelter Replacement Programme was in progress. Chris outlined promotional material and future plans including more widespread real time passenger information.

Q&A

David Butterworth – sufficient charging power for electric fleet? (A: Investment made, confident).

Roma Patten – printed timetables? (A: Yes, available at bus station and other outlets).

Richard Lysons – associated revival of shops, etc? (A: Yes, and nighttime economy. Also working with local communities).

Stephen Waring – Evening/ Sunday frequencies? (A: evening enhanced, younger market)

Keith Naylor –Aware of low-capacity buses on some well used services, inoperative information screens and removal of some bus shelters. (A: new

bus shelters to be provided, addressing issue of smaller capacity of some electric buses).

4. Transforming the North with a reformed railway: A New Direction?

David Hoggarth, Head of Strategic Rail, Transport for the North

David outlined the Strategic Plan's objectives which included doubling or trebling of passenger rail trips. The timeline for rail reform would include Network Capacity Constraints requiring a clear, prioritised pan-Northern plan and devolution to Metropolitan Combined Authorities, essential to deliver local priorities and integrated network.

David concluded by going through the Infrastructure and Services Programme and state of play for the North.

Q&A

John Bone asked about prospects for freight (A: Opportunities for Intermodal and Aggregates)

Terri Balon, RNIB – ticketing issues, lack of interavailability (A: integrated ticketing planned esp. with GBR)

Christine McGregor - Is a half hourly service still an ambition? (A: Yes, in general but would require further subsidy)

Ian Conway, LLRUG – access problems at Staveley station; solution stalled. (A: Reference to national plan for station accessibility; aware of Staveley problem).

David Butterworth pointed to the very high costs of renewals and maintenance e.g. £500,000 to repair a lift at Bolton station. (A: Ongoing programmes rather than one-offs needed).

John Carey – S&C not mentioned in Strategic Plan (A: DH to look at)

John Owen – Cumbria and Lancashire little reference in the plans (A: point taken)

5. Community Rail – The Challenges and Forming the Liverpool to Manchester CRP

Roy G Chapman, Director Community Rail Network

Roy described the background to the Community Rail Network and its value. He gave examples of the success of Community rail in the North and of the wider work of Community Rail. Community Rail needed to play a major role in GBR.

The Liverpool to Manchester CRP was a great opportunity with lots already happening and much more to do. Roy gave examples of how the CRP would benefit the Rail Industry, local communities and passengers.

7. Date of Next Conference

Thursday 20th March Lancaster (The Storey).

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