

TravelWatch NORTHWEST

Winner of CILT award for best practice in passenger transport (2013)

promoting quality public transport.....

Annual Review 2017-2018

Incorporating Business Plan 2019-2021



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

TravelWatch NorthWest Annual Review 2017-2018 (incorporating Business Plan 2019-2021)

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(Cover Photo; Chris Dale)

Chair's Foreword

The last year has been anything but quiet. There has been a constant stream of bad news regarding the bus and rail Industries in the press and social media and it shows no sign of diminishing. The only good news category has been about the two tram systems in the region.

The two new rail franchises which started with such promise two years ago are now experiencing one of the worst periods of disruption the industry has seen for many years. There has been a mountain of commentary and speculation about who to blame for the mess, interfering with the more important job of returning the network to something approaching normality.

This is an ideal opportunity for an organisation like Transport for the North to take a lead and have some authority over the normalisation mentioned before. Without some strong leadership, this disruption will continue for some time. Even the introduction of the new trains, which is imminent, may not be enough to satisfy passengers, especially after the large fares increase recently announced.

Bus services across the region are also in uncertain times with both city and rural routes facing cuts and major adjustments. The two city regions are looking at new ways to fund and operate services in their areas and the uncertainty is not helping the operators to provide the services that they think are appropriate.

In the shire county areas, marginal routes are under increasing pressure for funding, as their commercial viability shrinks and the local authorities' ability or willingness to provide subsidised services is changing. Maybe the bus industry should have a more robust financial model covering all services, regardless of location. This should be another role for Transport for the North.

The good news is from the trams, where investment is providing new services and rolling stock within the expected timescales and costs. The Blackpool North extension now has track laid and two new trams have already been delivered. In Manchester, work is well under way on the Trafford Park extension and the Mayor has approved an order for more trams to cope with increased usage.

I hope that there will be a better picture for next year's report, but much more has to be done. Rest assured that we will continue to put forward the needs of passengers throughout the coming year and hope that we can bring about some improvements. I would like to thank our members for their input during the year and the sterling work done by our Company Secretary, John Moorhouse to bring the many threads together.



Chris Dale, Chairman, September 2018

1. Introduction & Background

1.1 TravelWatch NorthWest (TWNW) was formerly known as the North West Public Transport Users Forum (NWPTUF). The NWPTUF was formed in October 2003 and was named TravelWatch NorthWest in 2006. It is an independent organisation representing all users of public transport in the North West. Membership is open to any not for profit organisation representing the interests of users or potential users of public transport. TravelWatch holds regular conferences open to the public at various locations in the North West that debate issues of interest and concern to public transport users who have the opportunity to contribute and raise their concerns. TravelWatch groups have also been established in South West England, the West Midlands, the East Midlands and Southern England.

1.2 TWNW's chief purpose is to influence, by research and campaigning, public transport policy in the North West always with passengers' interests foremost.

1.3 TWNW's mission statement is :-

Facilitating an integrated and seamless quality public transport network for North West England.

1.4 The vision of TWNW is to champion the interests of public transport users in the North West so the network can become:-

- Accessible to everyone
- Affordable and socially inclusive
- Available where and when it is needed
- Acceptable to all
- Attractive to users

1.5 The key objectives of TWNW are to:-

- Give users a platform to express their concerns and needs
- Promote the use of public transport in the North West
- Contribute to the development of regional transport strategies
- Produce influential best practice reports based on evidence

1.6 TWNW has established a good relationship with a wide range of stakeholders, and has addressed a number of key issues within the transport agenda in the region. It is increasingly being seen as an important sounding board for consultation on regional transport policies.

1.7 TravelWatch NorthWest was formally incorporated as a Community Interest Company in March 2007. The Company is made up of members who each agree to a liability of £1 and is run by a Board of Directors (***see Appendices A and C***).

2. Merseytravel & Merseyside matters

2.1 Merseytravel (Merseyside Integrated Transport Authority) is the Executive body that provides professional, strategic and operational transport advice to the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (comprising Merseyside and Halton) to enable it to make informed decisions. It is also the delivery arm.

2.2 TravelWatch NorthWest welcomes the generous support it receives from Merseytravel. Merseytravel has made great strides in improving public transport in Merseyside and continues to be forward looking and inventive.

2.3 At our conference in Liverpool in June 2017, Shane Fitzpatrick, Merseytravel's Head of Operations, spoke of the long term 30-year Rail Strategy which commenced in 2014 and is under 3-year periodical reviews. The strategy which will dovetail into the £340 million investment in the City Region includes a major upgrade to Lime Street station, City Centre improvement with emphasis on Liverpool Central, Park & Ride at Maghull and Newton le Willows, faster journeys with more capacity and step free access for the less abled. We also received an update on Merseyrail's new trains at the conference.

2.4 We have commended the Alliance system of bus operation, a partnership between Merseytravel and bus operators which appears to be starting to work in passengers' interests. Pointing this out to Steve Rotheram, the newly elected Mayor of the Liverpool City Region, we emphasised the opportunity to build on this and introduce a properly integrated system.

2.5 The provision of an HS2 Crewe hub should assist Merseyside's links to the High Speed network. Merseyside also deserves to be better served by long distance rail services and it is good news that the TPE franchise promises to provide direct services between Liverpool and Scotland in the not too distant future. There is also scope for more frequent through trains to the capital and we have pressed for this in the new West Coast Partnership franchise.

2.6 Another major scheme to benefit Merseyside is the restoration of the Halton Curve which will restore direct services between Liverpool/ Liverpool Airport and Chester and ultimately North Wales. Services, operated by the new Wales & Borders franchise, were proposed to start from December 2018. Ultimately, we would wish to see the Airport directly rail served.

2.7 In June 2017 we assisted Merseytravel by undertaking a survey of all station car parks on the Merseyrail network and on the City lines within the City Region. The take up of parking spaces for cars, motorcycle and bicycles was enumerated over a period of about 3 weeks. We are always happy to assist the Authority or indeed any other transport body in this way.

2.8 We are confident that our long-standing good relationships with the Authority will continue into the future.

3. Annual Review 2017/18

3.1 Conferences

3.1.1 TWNW held three conferences during the year to debate issues of concern in the North West, to promote best practice to operators and local authorities and to promote the development of forward-looking public transport policies across the region. As well as users, representatives of local transport authorities and public transport providers across the region attended the conferences. At each conference it is our practice to give an opportunity to delegates to make a short statement on any public transport issue of concern of no longer than a minute's duration.

3.1.2 The conferences were held in Liverpool on 8th June 2017, Salford on 12th October 2017 and Lancaster on 8th February 2018. Notes of the conferences are available on our website - www.travelwatch-northwest.org.uk

3.1.3 The conference in Liverpool was held at Merseytravel with kind support of Merseytravel and Virgin West Coast. We received presentations from –

- Shane Fitzpatrick, Head of Operations, Merseytravel.
- Rob Monnier, New Trains Programme, Merseytravel.
- Alex Crane, Operations Director, Stagecoach Merseyside, S.Lancs, Chester & Wirral.
- Michael Stewart, General Manager Anglo Scot, Virgin West Coast

56 delegates attended. (We were competing with the General Election!)

3.1.4 In Salford the conference was preceded by the Company's tenth AGM and held at the Old Fire Station, Salford University, with the kind support of Salford City Council. The conference was opened by Paul Dennett, the Mayor of Salford and Cllr Roger Jones, Executive Lead for Transport, Salford City Council and presentations were made by –

- Martin Shier, Bus Partnerships Delivery Manager, TfGM
- Brandon Jones, Head of External Relations, First UK Bus (Yorkshire & Greater Manchester)
- David Hoggarth, Director Rail North (now Transport for the North)
- Roy Chapman, Lynwood Transtec Ltd on the Salford Rail Strategy
- Steve Pyer, Mobike UK

70 delegates attended.

3.1.5 The conference in Lancaster was held in the Storey and was supported by First TransPennine Express and Northern Rail. The conference was opened by the Mayor of Lancaster, Councillor Roger Mace and speakers were –

- Chris Nutton, Major Projects Director, TransPennine Express
- Matthew Cranwell, Managing Director, Stagecoach, Cumbria and North Lancashire
- Craig Harrop, Community & Sustainability Director, Northern Rail

- Jim Davies, Lancaster District Bus Users Group
- Phil Halliwell, Blueworks Rural Bus and Taxis
- Anne Hall, Janet Willis and Barbara Harris from Friends of the X112.

78 delegates attended

3.2 Bus Services

3.2.1 In June 2017 we wrote to the two new elected Mayors of Greater Manchester and Merseyside together with a briefing paper covering our aspirations for public transport. In the paper we emphasised, inter alia, the opportunity now to introduce a properly integrated bus network, building on any improvements already in place. The following areas would benefit passengers

- Integrated and multi operator ticketing
- Bus priority measure to improve journey times
- Ability to cross subsidise to maintain less used but socially essential routes
- A sea change in information provision – real time visual and audible information on buses, real time information at bus stations and stops.
- Improved procedures for passenger input including a properly publicised complaints procedure on buses and elsewhere.
- Better more easily available advance information about bus fares
- Impartial information offices at bus stations covering all operators.

3.2.2 On Merseyside we were particularly dismayed by the removal of the bus lanes in Liverpool and we expressed our sincere hope that the new City Region Mayor would look carefully at all means to promote bus priority. Modal shift away from cars will not be achieved by removing priority from public transport.

3.2.3 In July 2017 we responded to Cheshire East Council on threats to remove subsidy from a range of bus services especially the complete withdrawal of evening and Sunday (including Bank Holiday) services which would not be in the interests of any current or potential bus passengers. Sunday is the busiest day for shopping, leisure and sport and public transport is vital for these activities, for visitors and workers in these industries alike. Many of these are in low paid jobs and are unable to afford alternative transport if buses are not available. The early end to services would mean that many workers would be unable to return home by bus. If unemployment followed there would be a burden on other local authority services.

3.2.4 Following our representations we were somewhat pleased that Cheshire East pulled back some of the cuts, retaining some evening and Sunday services. However, some villages would be still cut off and reliant on Community Transport.

3.2.5 The 4.5 mile long Leigh Guided Busway was opened in April 2016 and services using it also take advantage of a prioritised route along the East Lancs Road to give a journey time of around 50 minutes from Leigh and Atherton to Manchester city centre. At the Salford conference Brandon Jones, from First UK Bus, described the experiences of the first 18 months of operation of the Busway. It was pleasing to note that there had been very positive feedback from passengers. A Satisfaction Survey with 3800 responses had revealed a 98% satisfaction rate.

3.2.6 We have long advocated that all new buses should incorporate the features that are standard in London i.e. visual and audible next stop information for passengers. The First Bus Vantage low emission buses operating on the Leigh Guided busway incorporate this feature and together with TransDev Burnley Bus Co and Blackpool Transport's new vehicles lead the field in this vital provision.

3.2.7 We remained concerned at past withdrawals of local bus services especially in rural areas and the challenge of getting the passenger voice effectively heard. We have always maintained that it is difficult for Community Transport/ Demand Responsive Transport to replace bus services as such services are not accessible for all visitors, not just tourists, to the area. After progressive cuts in Lancashire in recent years it was good to note some stability and even modest improvements to selected subsidised services from December 2017 onwards. Indeed, at that time Lancs CC committed £1million per year for rural bus support.

3.3 Rail Matters

Franchising & Investment

3.3.1 During the year we continued to look forward to new trains, refurbished trains, the end of Pacers and extra capacity on both Northern and TPE. It is likely though that by the time the new trains arrive demand will have further risen and they will not adequately cater for the ongoing growth in demand. Prospective passengers are already (and have been for some time) discouraged from using rail because of full to capacity trains at peak times and grossly inadequate car parking space at many stations. A further point is that we understand that the design of the new trains for the Arriva Rail North will comprise self-contained 2,3 and 4 car sets with no end corridor connections (and only one toilet in each of the unit combinations including the 4 car!). Most current designs running on Northern (except for Pacers which are going) have end gangway connections to give flexibility for passengers and conductors alike.

3.3.2 We have discussed the introduction of ticket gates at stations by Northern. Whilst we commend all efforts to reduce fare evasion, there have appeared to be some practical problems for example at Rochdale. We have found ticket checks on trains to be inconsistent. A related issue has been the siting of ticket machines at remote unstaffed stations, with only one machine on one platform which could be a long way from the other platform.

3.3.3 Back in March 2015 we had commended the North of England Electrification Task Force's report "Northern Sparks", recognising that electrification brings significant benefits to passengers –

- Better reliability, faster acceleration and quicker journey times especially for services with frequent stops. Many local and interurban services in the North West would benefit from this.
- The electrification of diversionary routes enables services to operate more conveniently for passengers at times of disruption. This helps to minimise the use of replacement buses which are not generally liked by passengers

3.3.4 It was therefore very worrying that in July 2017 the government cancelled the Windermere line electrification and questioned the viability of the Trans Pennine electrification. We wrote to the Secretary of State in August and widely publicised our views. It appeared that, once again, the North was being short-changed compared with investment in the South East in particular.

3.3.5 In the letter we pointed out that spending on transport per head of population was only about one third than in London and this ratio was set to get worse. Many passengers were discouraged from travelling by rail because of severe overcrowding. Ironically, the news coincided with a government announcement that, in the interest of carbon emissions, diesel (and petrol) road vehicles were to be phased out by 2050. Also, the government had just announced the CrossRail 2 development, yet the North would, once again, see investment curtailed.

3.3.6 The response from Chris Grayling was very quick but did not impress. He failed to address the issue of environmental pollution in the face of government policy and also the incompatibility of transport spending per head. We did and do not see bi-mode trains as a viable option for the Windermere line, being more expensive to operate and maintain than electric trains and with poorer performance, especially on steeply graded alignments. We also felt that reference to hydrogen powered trains as alternative power was misleading as we understand that there is no proven technology in the near future.

3.3.7 In May 2017 we responded to Transport for Wales' consultation on the new Wales and Borders franchise. We were pleased that the consultation document stated that the network would continue at least at its present size so with presumably no plan to split routes at Chester or Shrewsbury to separate out Welsh and English routes - something which would have made no sense in terms of travel patterns or indeed operationally. However, there was no mention in the document of service patterns on cross border services.

(Full response available on our website www.travelwatch-northwest.org.uk)

3.3.8 In September 2017 we responded to the DfT consultation on the East Midlands franchise. Our major concern was about the Liverpool – Norwich route. We were comfortable with a handover of the route to TransPennine Express given trains with 100mph capability, more capacity and the inclusion

of First Class. However, we did have some reservations about splitting the service at Nottingham.

3.3.9 Although figures provided by First TPE showed only 4% of passengers going through Nottingham we had been involved in a previous survey some years ago which showed a considerably higher figure than this. Since then the practice of split ticketing has increased and it is likely that the growth in this phenomenon would account for more through journeys than ticket sales might show. We recommended that further independent on-board passenger surveys were carried out before decisions on splitting the service are made.

3.3.10 We also gave some further options for consideration, including the provision of a third Hope Valley Express service to serve the East Midlands, especially Leicester. This would require infrastructure capacity improvements, as are planned, on the Hope Valley line.

3.3.11 In an addendum to the response we bemoaned the possibility of removing additional peak hour stops at Chinley. East Midlands Trains and TransPennine Express between them allowed commuting between Chinley and Stockport.

(Full response available on our website www.travelwatch-northwest.org.uk)

Rail disruption

3.3.12 In January 2017 we had participated in and contributed to a workshop organised by Transport Focus and involving Northern and TransPennine Express. The event focussed mainly on how well the 2016 Xmas and New Year Manchester blockade had operated and how the experience could be improved for passengers. The following points were embodied in an action programme for the operators to take forward –

- Need for better customer service from bus drivers (the only contact passengers may have with the industry at that point).
- Need to improve information about buses and where to find them, for example at Manchester Airport.
- Ensure misleading information is eliminated, such as signage about bus replacement at Oxford Road and Bolton.
- Need for more proactive staff seeking to help passengers rather than waiting to be approached.

3.3.13 Work on the West Coast Main Line has proceeded through the year. In July 2017 we met with representatives of Virgin Trains West Coast and Network Rail in respect of the closure of Euston over August Bank Holiday 2017 for HS2 work. Amongst other issues we expressed concern about arrangements for those turning up at Euston to travel to the North West and the need to present the travel options in reverse as well. We also stressed the following requirements -

- Good and understandable information
- Personnel to be on hand at all points to provide assistance.
- Tolerance of all TOC's if passengers find themselves "off advertised route".

3.3.14 We undertook a small mystery shop during the complete closure of Bolton station in August 2017. Poor information at some stations and at bus stops was noted. For example, at Manchester Oxford Road very inadequate information was discovered. There were two general information posters at the station entrance and reference to BUS on screens but no direction/indication of where to go to catch the bus. A further experience similar to previous surveys was a lack of announcements on trains feeding into the area. Overall the key area still to address was the clarity and helpfulness of information at interchange points.

3.3.15 Liverpool Lime Street station was closed for improvements between 30/9/17 to 23/10/17 and we again undertook a small survey of replacement services. Our overall impressions were quite good showing improvements in key areas. It was also particularly pleasing that Virgin Trains called at Liverpool South Parkway, to enable passengers to change onto the Merseyrail network. We felt that the following could warrant more attention though–

- Clearer and more helpful information and signage to buses, etc. at stations especially Lime St and Liverpool South Parkway (LSP). But also at stations with through services to Liverpool including for example onward travel arrangements from LSP.
- Further attention to revenue protection.

High Speed Rail

3.3.16 In February 2017 Royal Assent was granted for Phase One – London to the West Midlands. We have always felt the use of Euston as a terminus to be problematical, especially in respect of onward travel, but the ability to change at the new Old Oak Common hub for Crossrail services is welcome. We remain concerned at the abandonment of the link between HS2 and HS1 especially as we aspire to through services between the North West and Europe which such a link would enable. We have also previously said that there must be a total regeneration of local and regional lines to connect to HS2 and main lines with modern, comfortable, reliable and efficient rolling stock. As far as possible HS2 stations should adjoin conventional stations for ease of transition to local/regional rail services. We are pleased that, currently, it appears all HS2 trains will also be able to run on the classic network. This will give maximum flexibility.

3.3.17 In August 2017 the DfT launched a consultation about the provision of a hub at Crewe to build on existing connectivity and to give better access to high speed services. Crewe is an important junction and requires good HS2 links with connections to a range of other destinations.

3.3.18 In our response we supported the concept and the proposal to split HS2 trains at Crewe to give extra services to destinations not needing full length trains. This would be particularly important for serving Blackpool and stations north of Preston – Lancaster, Oxenholme, Penrith and Carlisle. The Lake District is now a World Heritage Site which is likely to increase its already burgeoning tourism potential. We would strongly press for HS2 London services

to call at Lancaster, Oxenholme and Penrith. We pointed out that Oxenholme in itself produced more traffic with London than Carlisle and Penrith combined, according to data from Virgin Trains. We strongly emphasised that this area must retain the best possible links with the capital.

3.4 Integration

3.4.1 TWNW recognises the Importance of multi modal integration - essential to encourage shift from cars. We emphasised this in our submissions to the new elected Mayors - Andy Burnham and Steve Rotheram – in June 2017.

3.4.2 We pointed out that multi modal ticketing, as in the Netherlands and London, is essential to grow the public transport market and permit seamless travel. Allied to this there should be a simple fares system, including multi modal on demand ticketing, based on zonal travel using smartcard/contactless payment.

3.4.3 We voiced approval of the bus and ticketing systems that prevailed in London though recognising that this came at a high cost.

3.4.4 We said also that information should be easy to obtain and understandable in many forms and should not just be reliant on web-based systems. A sizeable section of the community still relied on paper timetable leaflets and displayed information at bus and rail stations. In this context bus stations **must** have information about nearby rail services and, correspondingly rail stations and bus services.

3.4.5 The promotion of walking and cycling is a laudable aim and one we hope will lead to more cycle parking facilities at railway stations. We stressed the facility to take one's bike on a train. This should not be overlooked and indeed any enhancements to provision for bikes on rolling stock would be appreciated.

3.4.6 In April 2018 we responded to consultation by Lancashire County Council on proposals to close Transport Information Centres at Carnforth, Clitheroe, Nelson and Preston. In view of the commitment to bus support as mentioned above we said that it seemed perverse to remove these important information outlets which help to promote the supported services. Visitors to an area often found it difficult to find out about bus services and the savings would be paltry. In the case of Clitheroe rail ticket sales made a valuable contribution. Here and at Carnforth, we suggested that an alternative operational model could be considered, possibly involving other agencies, to save costs and extend the scope of those activities.

3.4.7 At Carnforth where rail ticket sales were also buoyant we preferred retention of the current service as the operating deficit was comparatively minimal when measured against the value of the service and the Council's overall transport budget. It is regrettable that LCC recommended closure rather than investigate an operational partnership solution and only local intervention has managed to bring the proposals to light and to look at future scenarios.

(Full response available on our website www.travelwatch-northwest.org.uk)

3.5 Light Rail

3.5.1 The Manchester Metrolink system continues to expand and is widely appreciated by its users. The second city crossing opened early in 2017 and offers a useful additional link between Victoria and St Peters Square. An additional stop between Exchange Square and St Peters Square would have been welcome as the two stops are quite a long way apart, given the city centre ambience.

3.5.2 We have previously reported on the need, as Metrolink expands, for greater integration with other modes especially through ticketing with rail services. Unfortunately, no progress has been made such that -

- It is still not possible to buy a ticket from Metrolink stations to any national rail station outside Greater Manchester (e.g. Bury to London).
- National rail tickets routed via Manchester originating or finishing outside Greater Manchester and involving a change of station between Piccadilly and Victoria do not include travel on Metrolink.
- Other deficiencies include routing anomalies as the system grows. For example, a ticket from Hebden Bridge to Oldham would assume route via Victoria rather than the more convenient change at Rochdale. It could be cheaper to buy separate tickets in these circumstances.
- By and large (with some exceptions e.g. Oldham) National Rail Enquiries does not recognise any Metrolink station even though there are through fares from rail.

3.5.3 During the year we welcomed improvements in on-tram announcements, including interchange with other modes - at Victoria for example. This is good news especially from the point of view of visitors to the city who are unfamiliar with the system. A meeting with Danny Vaughan, Transport for Greater Manchester's Metrolink Manager, in December 2017, elicited the following developments –

- A new map to be developed with line colours and plans to put route numbers on the front of trams (a measure we have long advocated)
- More new trams to supplement peak capacity by creating more double units.

It was interesting to note from the discussions that St Peters Square was the busiest station and that this, together with the imbalance of termini North/East v. South, played a part in determining the service patterns.

3.5.4 In 2018 work started on the building of the tram link to Blackpool North station from Talbot Square. Completion is set for the summer of 2019. Extension of the tram line to Kirkham or even Preston replacing the current rail line from Blackpool South has been mooted but we recognise there are mixed views on this. Notwithstanding, the Blackpool South line is in serious need of upgrading.

3.6 Consultations

3.6.1 TWNW responded to various consultations throughout the year, including:

- *Wales & Borders Franchise (Transport for Wales 19.5.17)* – see paragraph 3.3.7 above.
- *Master Plan 2050 (Liverpool John Lennon Airport 14.7.17)* – we highlighted the relatively poor connections with Liverpool South Parkway, the need to improve rail connections from a wider area and ultimately aspired to a direct rail service to the Airport.
- *Bus Service Review (Cheshire East Council 27.7.17)* – see 3.2.3 and 3.2.4 above.
- *East Midlands Franchise (DfT 6.10.17)* – see 3.3.8 – 3.3.11 above.
- *Crewe Hub (DfT 10.10.17)* – see 3.3.17 – 3.3.18 above.
- *Accessibility Action Plan (DfT 17.11.17)* - we pressed for, amongst other things, improvements to accessibility at stations, audio/ visual information systems on buses and other information provision including how to complain. All our recommendations would help all public transport passengers not just those with disabilities.
- *Congestion, Capacity and Carbon: Priorities for National Infrastructure (National Infrastructure Commission 12.01.18)* - we focussed on the need to promote greater use of public transport as a valuable aid to tackling acknowledged burgeoning road congestion.
- *Community Rail (DfT 26.1.18)* – we commended Community Rail’s locus in promoting local services in all possible ways to encourage a switch to rail. We detected some neglect of the initiative in urban areas. There should be a focus on widening CRPs to include more urban lines and stations e.g. in the Salford area serving the route to the west of Manchester’s city centre. Community Rail should also be promoted on main through lines.

(Responses available on our website www.travelwatch-northwest.org.uk)

4. Current Workstreams (2018/19)

4.1 Conferences

4.1.1 Blackpool on 14th June 2018, kindly sponsored by Blackpool Council and Blackpool Transport Services Ltd. Speakers were –

- Jane Cole, Managing Director, Blackpool Transport Services Ltd.
- Patrick Cawley, Director of Route Sponsorship, LNW Route, Network Rail
- Elaine Williams, Deputy Service Delivery Director, National Express Ltd

50 delegates attended (a rail strike did not help) some of whom enjoyed a heritage tram ride after lunch, courtesy of Blackpool Transport Services.

4.1.2 Planned to be in Liverpool on 18th October 2018, supported by Merseytravel, Stagecoach and Arriva NW. Planned to feature –

- Cllr Liam Robinson Chair, Merseytravel
- Andy Heath, Managing Director, Merseyrail
- Howard Farrall, MD Arriva North West
- Rob Jones, MD Stagecoach Merseyside and South Lancs
- Matt Goggins, Head of Bus, Merseytravel.

4.1.3 Planned to be in Manchester on 7th February 2019. To include, provisionally, the Mayor of Greater Manchester, West Coast Partnership franchise, TransPennine Express, bus matters and a workshop session.

4.2 Current Bus Matters

4.2.1 In June 2018 we launched a report on a mystery shop of bus services across the North West, carried out in the Spring.

4.2.2 A total of 218 bus journeys were made by our members across the North West region on a wide range of operators and improvements noted included more modern accessible vehicles, brighter on-board ambience and generally more consistent driving standards.

4.2.3 However we found there was still a long way to go particularly with regard to real time bus running information at bus stations and bus stops (in stark contrast to London and other points of the country) and the availability of on board next stop information (especially vital for the many unfamiliar bus users). In the latter case this was found on only 4% (spoken) and 5% (visual) of the journeys made, again in stark contrast to London and other areas.

(Report available on our website www.travelwatch-northwest.org.uk)

4.2.4. The national concession fare scheme has been important in reducing loneliness and isolation - a key government target. A concern is whether there is a correlation between the large-scale withdrawal of marginal bus services and a low reimbursement rate to operators.

4.2.5 The Bus Services Act 2017 committed to a “step change in the information available to bus passengers”. We had previously made our views known on the Bill and it was pleasing to see undertakings in the Act to provide better information on bus services and at bus stops. In July 2018 the Department for Transport launched two related consultations related to the provisions of the Act -

- On ways to improve information for bus passengers
- On the development of comprehensive Open Data

We have responded to these emphasising the need for better next stop information and buses, real time information at bus stops and greater transparency of fares information.

4.3 Current Rail Matters

4.3.1 We strongly support the Northern Powerhouse rail network and Transport for the North, which we know is committed to the TransPennine route upgrade

and the Northern Hub, including increased capacity and journey time improvements. We will continue to campaign for proper rail investment in the North West.

Timetable changes

4.3.2 In June/ July 2017 we had responded to consultation from both Northern and TransPennine Express on proposed timetable changes from May 2018. We made a number of specific comments on some of the less favourable changes but generally welcomed service increases though with the proviso that these would depend on the availability of extra rolling stock, especially for Northern.

4.3.3 One particular concern we highlighted was the ability of Manchester Victoria to cope with the many TPE extra services. We pointed out that, in our experience, signal delays awaiting a platform were commonplace from both east and west. From experience since the start of the new timetable this seems to have been borne out.

4.3.4 A few weeks before the start of the May timetable we wrote to David Hoggarth, Transport for the North (TfN), on the subject of the poor performance of Arriva Rail North since the commencement of its franchise. We said that the number of train cancellations experienced in recent months was unprecedented in the history of the railway and cited the glaring example of Cumbria where, in our view, the ill-considered handover from TransPennine to Northern has been a complete failure for passengers, especially on the Windermere line. We were told that this line was regularly suffering 90% of the day's trains being cancelled with not all services are being replaced by buses.

4.3.5 We were particularly alarmed that the reasons being given for the cancellations were not exclusively infrastructure, engineering or train problems, but also shortage of drivers and conductors. We received a response from Barry White, Chief Executive of TfN, which shared our concerns. TfN had formally written to Northern and asked the train operating company to produce a performance improvement plan clearly setting out what the Franchise was doing to address our concerns.

4.3.6 The above circumstances were then overtaken by events in the shape of the new timetable that commenced on 20th May. Due to a number of factors again mainly a shortage of drivers and conductors, partly arising from delays to the Bolton & Blackpool lines electrification, the outcome was disastrous for several lines. Again, the Windermere line suffered badly with the service actually being totally replaced by buses for a while and then a private train charter company stepping in to offer a free rail service. The latter was good news for passengers although it is regrettable that we had reports of Northern not welcoming this novel enterprise which was instigated initially following collusion between West Coast Rail and the Community Rail Partnership and supported by local MP, Tim Farron. We have responded to the House of Commons Transport Committee Inquiry into the problems of the May timetable from our Region's perspective.

4.3.7 Unfortunately in spite of action by Northern cancellations have continued. The Furness line saw 112 cancellations during the 1st half of July with few bus replacement services and the Lakes Line seeing many in August - the prime holiday month - along with short formed trains and standby road coaches not being deployed. The whole sorry state of affairs has been exacerbated by the prolonged industrial action over Northern's attempts to introduce driver controlled door operation in compliance with the franchise agreement. At the time of writing there was no end in sight to the dispute.

4.3.8 We have already referred to the cancellation of the promised electrification of the Windermere line and at the time of writing there is a glimmer of hope that all is not lost on this front, with support coming from the Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership.

4.3.9 One victim of the cancellations during the summer has been Lancashire DalesRail, affecting well over half of the planned services and seriously exasperating passengers. We supported the call of SCRDC and FOSCL for Northern to look at using a charter operator to run the service to ensure dependability but to no avail. We did play a part in elevating the discussion to the Director of the Rail North partnership and can only trust that a more reliable service is operated next summer.

4.3.10 The new timetable also appeared ambitious for TransPennine Express with more trains serving Manchester Victoria adding to the congestion there. Punctuality and reliability took a nose dive and trains have been turned round short of their destinations e.g. some which should have gone to Manchester Airport, very inconvenient for those passengers with flights to catch. As far as Network Rail is concerned in general there appears to have been a lack of attention to the practicability of operational factors and a lack of contingency to allow for perturbations in services, both TPE and Northern. Witness the Manchester Victoria example above. We have also received reports that Network Rail is short of experienced timetablers at its Milton Keynes office.

4.3.11 Other aspects of the TPE franchise regarding timetables have included the controversial off-peak skip stop pattern on the Greenfield line following transfer from Northern and removal of peak stops at Chinley, inhibiting commuting to Stockport and Manchester (see also 3.3.11)

4.3.12 In September 2018 TPE announced some changes to the timetable from December to address the performance issues and provide greater resilience for services on the North TransPennine route. Also that month a report from the ORR on the May timetable changes concluded that Network Rail, Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR), Northern, the Department for Transport (DfT), and the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) all made mistakes, which contributed to the collapse of services, particularly on the GTR and Northern routes. The Inquiry found problems caused by delays to completing the North West Electrification Programme were worsened by Network Rail, which wrongly believed it could make up the time. We trust that these lessons will be learned for the future.

West Coast Main Line Disruption

4.3.13 For over three years we have campaigned, along with the Friends of the Settle – Carlisle line (FOSCL), for the Settle – Carlisle line (S&C) to be used for diversions from the West Coast Main Line when engineering work takes place. A meeting with Virgin West Coast in April 2017 revealed that in summary it was not Virgin's policy to divert via S&C, because train crews no longer had the knowledge to support this route and it would be very expensive to reinstate this knowledge. Also, paths on the S&C were limited (though freight has declined considerably). However, our view is that keeping passengers on through services is far preferable to the time-consuming inconvenience of changing from train to coach at Preston and reversing the process at Carlisle.

4.3.14 We have been in correspondence with Jo Johnson, Minister of State for Transport on this issue. We have laboured the point about comparative journey times between Preston and Carlisle and, including changing from train to coach or train to train, there is no time penalty for the latter. Add to this the annoyance caused by forcing passengers with their luggage into an irritating queue, followed by a cramped coach journey lacking all the facilities of a train and another disruption at the next change point, and a Voyager type train taking many more passengers than a coach has to be the indisputable solution.

4.3.15 Recent research by Transport Focus confirms earlier studies showing that passengers prefer to stay on trains even where there are time penalties. There is thus a compelling argument for train services to be diverted over the S&C. Where coach times are similar to or greater than rail diversions passengers will certainly prefer to travel on a train after they have bought a 'train' ticket and avoid the enormous inconvenience of transferring to road services.

4.3.16 We think that cost has much to do with the argument – it may well be that the use of replacement buses is a cheaper option, but it is not in passengers' best interests. Following a blatant rebuff from Jo Johnson we are contacting local MPs and have put the arguments to the West Coast Partnership franchise preferred bidders.

4.3.17 We commented on the arrangements and quality of information regarding the closure of Euston station over 3 weekends in August/September 2018. We pointed that the VT website lacked comprehensive information regarding alternative ways of travelling to and from London at those weekends.

5. Plans for 2019/21

5.1 Continuation of the pattern of 3 conferences per year at locations in the North West. Conferences will feature presentations, discussion and input into the planned work streams. Opportunities will also be presented for users to make representations on any public transport issue at the conferences.

5.2 TOWNW is considering a number of areas of proactive work on behalf of public transport users and these are listed below. However, in addition TOWNW

appreciates that it must have the capacity to react to issues as they arise and in particular to matters on which it may be consulted.

5.3 Also TWNW is keen to continue with undertaking project/ consultancy work. TWNW has within its membership a considerable depth of resource of experienced public transport users together with professional transport expertise. This makes the organisation well capable of carrying out passenger-based research to inform and assist Regional and Local Authorities, PTEs and Operators.

5.4 As well as working with other TravelWatches on interregional issues, TWNW is committed to work in partnership with other user bodies including Transport Focus, Bus Users UK, the Campaign for Better Transport, Railfuture, Community Rail Partnerships and passenger users' groups.

5.5 The following areas of work are being considered for 2019/2021 -

- An examination of coach service provision and quality.
- Monitoring of the effectiveness of Community Transport.
- Further monitoring of the rail passenger experience including the on-train environment, information, ticketless travel, station facilities including the adequacy of car parking provision, engineering disruption (including the quality of replacement road services) and connections at interchanges.
- Continued liaison with all rail franchises and Network Rail, including specific monitoring of changes/improvements to rail services.
- The passenger experience at airports including public transport connectivity and the delays caused by check in and security.
- A review of progress with multi modal ticketing (including PLUSBUS) since the publication of TWNW's report on this subject in December 2005
- The availability and accuracy of journey planning and multi modal information on transport websites and at rail/ bus stations and transport interchanges.
- An assessment of transport integration & car parking at stations and door to journey options.
- Accessibility to buses, including bus stops.

5.6 TWNW will respond to consultation on public transport developments on behalf of users. In determining its responses TWNW has the capacity to conduct independent passenger-based research as appropriate.

5.7 TWNW will continue to be well placed to feed user input into consultations on regional and local government planning issues. TWNW will continue to strive to bring forward passenger concerns to the attention of the appropriate providers and procurers and to achieve improvements on their behalf

Appendix A Administration

TWNW is managed by a Board of Directors. The Board considers topical issues for debate at conferences and manages actions arising from each conference. It also considers and determines the issues that the company should consider.

TravelWatch NorthWest is chaired by **Chris Dale**. A retired hospital theatre technician, living in Macclesfield, he has been actively involved in public transport campaigning for over 25 years and is a dedicated user of public transport. Chris chairs the Crewe to Manchester Community Rail Partnership and the Cheshire local group of the Campaign for Better Transport. He is also involved with the Campaign for Better Transport at a national level. .

The Company Secretary is **John Moorhouse**. John was Secretary of the Rail Passengers Committee for North West England from 1985 until 2004. He is also Chairman of the Settle-Carlisle Railway Development Company.

Roy Chapman acts as Advisory Assistant. Having spent some 35 years in the railway and tramway industries, including 14 years with TfGM, he has considerable experience with transport management, customer service, community rail initiatives and consultancy.

Directors who served on the Board during 2017/18 –

Chris Dale (Chair)
David Butterworth
Lillian Burns
Malcolm Conway
Leonard Green
John Hart

Chris Holmes
Colin Kennington
John Owen
Richard Rollins
Robert Talbot
Tony Young

A National Liaison Group comprising TravelWatch Chairs co-ordinates work on national issues and with Transport Focus.

TravelWatch NorthWest is most grateful for the generous support it has received and receives from various sponsors as follows-

- Merseytravel, First TransPennine Express, First UK Bus, Stagecoach NW, Manchester & Merseyside, Transport Focus, Blackpool Council, Lancashire County Council, Transport for Greater Manchester, Blackburn with Darwen Council, Arriva Rail North, Blackpool Transport Services Ltd., TransDev Blazefield Ltd., Arriva NW.

Website – www.travelwatch-northwest.org.uk

Email - admin@travelwatch-northwest.org.uk

Or - johnamoorhouse@gmail.com

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1408838502725860/>

Appendix B Accounts 2017/18

DETAILED PROFIT AND LOSS ACCOUNT YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2018

	2018		2017
	£	£	£
TURNOVER		10017	9895
<i>COST OF SALES</i>			
Project fees	690		208
Administration fees	2360		3000
Totals		<u>3050</u>	<u>3208</u>
GROSS PROFIT/(LOSS)		6967	6687
<i>OVERHEADS</i>			
Travel and subsistence	808		777
Conferences & Meetings	1615		1358
Office costs	1335		1029
Accommodation	2304		2325
Insurance	231		217
Web hosting/ subscriptions	92		157
Publicity	87		72
Totals		<u>6472</u>	<u>5935</u>
		495	752
<i>OTHER OPERATING INCOME</i>			
Members income	475		335
Sundry donations	775		667
Totals		<u>1250</u>	<u>1002</u>
OPERATING PROFIT/(LOSS)		1745	1754
Interest receivable		12	13
PROFIT/(LOSS) ON ORDINARY ACTIVITIES		1757	1767

Appendix C Membership (at September 2018)

Organisation/Name

Blackpool & Fylde Rail Users Association (RUA)
Bus Users UK
Campaign for Better Transport Cheshire
Campaign for Better Transport Lancashire
Copeland Rail Users Group
Chinley & Buxworth Transport Group
Blackburn & District CTC
Friends of Eccles Station
Friends of Hindley Station
Friends of Reddish South Station
Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line
Goyt Valley RUA
Lakes Line RUG
Lancaster & District Bus Users Group
Lancaster & Skipton RUG
Merseytravel
North Cheshire RUG
NW Transport Activists RoundTable
Ormskirk Preston Southport Travellers Association
Railfuture NW
Ribble Valley Rail
Skipton East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership
Support the East Lancashire Line Association
Support the Oldham Rochdale Line Association
Wirral Transport Users Association
Wrexham Bidston RUA
Mr JF Aaron
David Butterworth
Frederick Consterdine
Malcolm Conway
Adrian Dunning
Leonard Green
Philip Harrison
John Hart
Christopher Holmes
Alan Hurst
Colin Kennington
Geoff Kerr
Andrew MacFarlane
Brendan O'Friel
John Owen
Keith Pennyfather
Malcolm Richardson
Ian Stuart
Ian Watson
Keith Whitmore
Tim Young
Tony Young