

TravelWatch NORTHWEST

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

promoting quality public transport.....

Annual Review 2020-2021



Healthy business for the Windermere train at Oxenholme station Spring Bank Holiday May 2021

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

TravelWatch NorthWest Annual Review 2020-2021

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(Cover Photo; Michael Nicholson)

Chair's Foreword

If only I had bought a better crystal ball! Around this time last year I reported that after what turned out to be the first lockdown things were looking up. Buses, trains and trams were being used by increasing numbers and everything seemed to look so rosy. But that sadly was not to last. The first lockdown was a mere forerunner of far worse to come.

By January 2021 some 60,000 cases of Covid19 were being reported each day and hospitals across the nation were rapidly becoming overwhelmed. Needless to say, all forms of public mobility (even walking to the shops) suffered a severe downturn. Public transport continued to provide for those who required it for their work, especially those in the NHS, but the fare income came nowhere near to balancing the books. The government bailed out train companies (except Eurostar), and most bus and tram operators whilst the nation held its breath – literally.

There was no pleasure in witnessing the plight of humanity worldwide and, had it not been for the effective vaccination programme initiated by the NHS, our families and friends would have suffered in like manner. Having said that we mourn the loss of close to 130,000 souls. Long-Covid has taken its toll as has the never-ending strain on NHS workers and support staff.

As I write this report we have passed our 'Freedom Day', whatever that might have meant, and slowly, hopefully surely, the number of cases and deaths is reducing. Public transport may increasingly return to a semblance of normality but with a whole, previously unknown, different complexion. The jam-packed morning and evening peaks may be a thing of the past and the industry will have to adapt accordingly to survive. On a more positive note there is a chance that if sufficient 'nudge power' is used more people will use public transport in their leisure time. Local transport administrators and government officials will need to be brave to weather the financial storm which has stealthily descended on us all. A positive approach to the social value of public transport must be paramount.

On the subject of storms, they are just one facet of the increasing threat of impending climate change – no, sorry, it's with us NOW. We all hope that massive, worldwide decisions will be taken at the Cop26 conference on October to attempt to stem the tide of misery which will affect so many people in the years to come. Public transport has to play its part, and quickly. One clear message which comes out whenever public transport plans are being hatched – their actual birth takes oh! so long. Only government ministers can press the go-button to enable cleaner public transport to come on stream, not by 2040 but much, much sooner. Civilised, forward-looking countries have embraced electrification of their railway systems already, yet in this country we (sorry, the 'powers that be') just carry on with interminable discussions. Shall we have hydrogen powered trains (do they not know that economical hydrogen production produces carbon as a by-product?) or shall we have battery operated trains to help cover the last few miles (except that the deadweight of batteries over the rest of the electrified network will reduce any savings by not electrifying that last few miles in the first place?). Brexit does not rule out copying the best practices of our European friends. On our patch that means

electrify most routes except perhaps the S & C and the Cumbrian coast line between Barrow and Workington. For ultimate environmental gain even the short branches need the wires.

Thinking of European practice reminds me just how dilatory our country is in working towards (or even identifying the need for) an integrated public transport system. Having experienced it in practice I am always reminded of the Swiss approach. A single unified timetable coordinated by SBB, the train operator, covers trains, buses, funiculars, cable cars and boats. A single unified fares system allows multi-modal journeys to be bought in a single transaction where all fares are known in advance (UK bus operators please take note). In addition the Swiss method involves total integration of timetables such that a connecting bus will arrive at the nodal railway station say 5 minutes ahead of the departure time for the onward train – and likewise for the return journey.

Contrast the above with my local example where the feeder bus from my area in Clitheroe arrives at the railway station just five minutes before the train's departure. That sounds fine except that it will take at least five minutes to walk between bus and train and buy the ticket from the machine. By which time the train will have gone. I could catch the bus 30 minutes earlier – but why should I have to? To purchase my complete journey ticket either on the bus to the station or via my mobile phone would be the logical solution. Yes in Switzerland (and certain other European countries) but not in England.

The degree of release created by Freedom Day and the problems associated with foreign travel have created overwhelming numbers in popular holiday destinations. People have resorted to staycations. The upside is income for the recently deprived shops and accommodation providers but the downside is a significant increase in local traffic. It is not surprising that people will hop into their car to make the trip from, say, Ambleside to Grasmere as the return fare on the bus is £8.50 for a 15 minute journey. For a family with two children that makes £25.50. Forget it, we'll take the car despite adding to traffic congestion. Our European friends have sussed that one as well. Anyone staying in accommodation in the area pays a daily tourist tax. This covers certain cheaper admission perks to museums etc and, this is the important bit, it permits free public transport within a stated area. The car remains on the hotel car park, the bus is full but the roads much less so. Problem solved – but not yet here in UK.

Having endured our unavoidable Zoom conferences and TOWN Board meetings over the last 18 months I am looking forward to the opportunity of a 'proper' conference where we can all meet again face to face (but not too close, please) and have a far more enjoyable experience – with food as well. Keep your fingers crossed for Blackpool in October.

Finally, we have not forgotten Chris, our chairman of 12 years. It's been a long haul, for various reasons, but we hope to unveil a commemorative bench on Macclesfield Station in the near future. Our indefatigable secretary, John Moorhouse, has diligently pursued this project as well as continuing to coordinate wide-ranging consultations and encouraging transport operators to do the best they can for their passengers throughout these unusual times.

David J Butterworth

September 2021

1. Introduction & Background

1.1 TravelWatch NorthWest (TWNW) originated as the North West Public Transport Users Forum (NWPTUF). The NWPTUF was formed in October 2003 and its public name became 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 other parts of the country.

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 several 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. Annual Review 2020/21

2.1 Covid 19

2.1.1 The year has been bedevilled with the coronavirus crisis which has had devastating effects on public transport. The extremely negative government advice/ rulings to people to avoid public transport effectively created a climate of fear and discouraged passengers from using rail, light rail and bus.

2.1.2 In response to the HOCTC's enquiry in June 2020 we said that with home working currently widespread there might well not be a headlong rush back to the environmentally unsustainable practice of people working in the office.

2.1.3 On buses we commented that the impacts of social distancing were being acutely felt and there was a need to get people back to using buses to avoid increased road congestion and for environmental reasons. The competition for space on our streets and roads and the greater demands for cycling and walking space would require a considered approach to ensure that bus priority did not lose out. A financial package of measures from the government to support bus and light rail (including Manchester Metrolink) announced in August 2020 was welcome.

2.1.4 With rail in mind we see the need for better integration and with the rise in popularity of cycling a re-look at previously largely negative policies on the carrying of bicycles on trains and indeed on light rail is urgently needed. The importance of the whole journey experience and the need for more convenient transport interchanges and hubs cannot be under stressed.

2.1.5 A slight easing of the message in July 2020 prompted us to comment that less frequent visits to the office warranted a more flexible approach to rail season tickets such as the carnet system, where selected days of the week can be chosen to travel with an overall discount available as with a more conventional season ticket. We understood that these were already offered/contemplated by some rail operators but stressed they should be rolled out nationally.

2.1.6 In September 2020 we responded to a further House of Commons Transport Committee inquiry into the pandemic - "Reforming public transport after the pandemic".

2.1.7 In adding to our comments above we intimated that after Covid 19:

- There would not be a universal return to office working as it was before the pandemic;
- The future would see a greater proportion of working from home for office workers and more flexible working as the norm;
- The demand for office space would change, with some fall in demand, offset by greater use of serviced office space.

- Reductions in peak travel demand could lessen the pressure for investment to meet that demand. However, investment could then be directed at improving overall capacity and reliability.

2.1.8 Measures to attract people back to using public transport would be paramount and we emphasized that public transport must adapt to be a more attractive alternative to the private car. This would of course help the urgent need to reduce or eliminate carbon emissions.

2.1.9 Rail electrification is of course an important factor in emissions and making rail more attractive. We added that recent deliveries of new rail rolling stock which was wholly or partly diesel powered, even where running on electrified routes, militated against carbon reduction. Much more needs to be done to make rail more attractive for a wider range of users especially leisure, including for example a re-look at previously largely negative policies on the carrying of bicycles on trains and indeed on light rail.

2.1.10 We commented that the Covid 19 crisis had provided some insight into what a better and more environmentally friendly future for our centres of population could be like. These conurbations must be dependent upon walking, cycling and sustainable public transport, with priority measures where appropriate. Limitless car use would not be an option for future mobility in cities and elsewhere. With some 22% of UK carbon emissions arising from cars, the UK must not return to an excessive reliance on car travel, but must develop innovative and sustainable public transport as an alternative, including a bigger role for light rail and electric buses.

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

2.1.11 Fast forward to the summer of 2021 and the way out of the pandemic still looks unclear with home working still very much in the picture. There is some good news with flexible season tickets set to be introduced at the end of June, although it would appear they may not always be good value. Leisure travel is also picking up well especially given restrictions on foreign holidays. However, whereas use of motor vehicle is back to at least pre Covid levels public transport continues to languish and there is still much to be done to get people back to buses and trains.

2.1.12 During the pandemic some long distance rail operators have introduced compulsory seat reservations to control the number of people travelling. LNER, at least, appears to be contemplating making this a permanent feature and this topic has led to widespread concern that it should not continue when “normality” returns. The walk-up railway is essential for many, especially commuters and others who have unpredictable journey patterns, often using long distance services for short journeys. An example in our region is Macclesfield to Manchester where if compulsory seat reservations on Avanti West Coast were to be introduced, many passengers would be forced on to already crowded Northern and CrossCountry trains instead.

2.2 Bus Services

2.2.1 In May 2020 we responded to the County Councils Network consultation on the decline of rural buses. We set out the many arguments we have used in the past to make the case for providing and indeed restoring rural transport connectivity –

- the decline of services in rural communities
- social isolation of the less mobile in society
- the need to integrate community transport
- improvements in information and accessibility
- the need for greater clarity of fares information
- lack of integration

2.2.2 We reiterated the points we had made in response to the government's announcement of an extra £5 billion for buses (see also paragraphs 3.2.1 – 3.2.9 below - National Bus Strategy) We concluded by saying that as there is no legal obligation to provide local bus services, Local Transport Authority support, as spending cuts have deepened, has fallen drastically in the past and for one authority at least – Cumbria CC – there has been a complete cessation of all support. We emphasised our strong belief that the provision of a socially necessary network should be an essential rather than a discretionary duty.

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

Bus franchising in Greater Manchester

2.2.3 In June 2020 GMCA published its report into the consultation on bus franchising in Greater Manchester. The proposal had been for a phased introduction of a bus franchising scheme in the 10 local authority areas of Greater Manchester. As a statutory consultee, we had responded to the consultation in January 2020. We were pleased that the June 2020 report made a specific reference to a summary of challenges that we had set out in our original response, vis –

- Reliability - traffic congestion and the need for bus priority measures,
- The convenience of the car and growth in car ownership together with lack of car restraint in cities like Manchester
- Unfamiliarity with ticket purchasing procedures (pricing, how to pay, etc), journey planning and information. Difficulty of accessing information about fares
- Customer care perception and in reality - very much down to driver attitude and conduct
- Lack of fares integration and poor modal interchange arrangements.
- In turn this results in an over complex fare structure, which is a disincentive to travel
- Lack of on-bus information systems, not least real time

2.2.4 We were also flattered that our input received 17 mentions in GMCA's report, including the point that "while franchising in itself would not cut congestion, the major cause of unreliability and extended journey times for

buses, it is imperative that it must bring with it the incentive for TfGM to invest in bus priority as it, rather than the operators, would benefit from lower costs and higher revenue. Buses must be given sufficient priority (not just bus lanes, but bus stop clearways which are enforced) and effective enforcement of parking/waiting/loading restrictions so that the buses keep moving”.

2.2.5 In terms of passenger representation the consultation had specifically asked for views on how GMCA would consult on how well the proposed franchising scheme was working. We said that in this connection there was a requirement to consult organisations “representative of users of local services”. As a statutory consultee for this consultation exercise we felt that TWNN would, subject to appropriate funding, be well placed to undertake this role on an ongoing basis

2.2.6 In the June 2020 Consultation Report a wordy response to our suggestion was as follows – “TfGM can see the value of making any consultation as wide in practice as is reasonable in the circumstances and to determine who to consult in addition to organisations representative of users in the light of the circumstances prevailing when the consultation takes place. It is, however, not proposed that the Proposed Franchising Scheme is modified to require consultation with others not required by the Act to be included in any consultation about how the Proposed Franchising Scheme is working. Being a statutory consultee to this consultation does not itself require an organisation automatically being consulted regardless of circumstances subsequently. *However, if TWNN were considered by GMCA to represent the views of users at the time of any consultation then they could be consulted with, without the need to be formally incorporated or identified into the Proposed Franchising Scheme.*”

2.2.7 We draw some encouragement from the italicised (ours) section of the above and will continue to press the matter.

2.2.8 In January 2021 we responded to a further consultation by GMCA on the impact of Covid 19 on the franchising plans. We emphasised that the view expressed in our original response to the consultation had not changed and repeated that on balance we supported the Proposed Franchising Scheme. We did and do have some concerns about the costs involved and we trust that the government will honour its pledge on this key consideration.

2.2.9 We also reprised our ambition that franchising should bring the following benefits for passengers -

- Integrated and multi operator ticketing with a simpler and in some cases cheaper fares.
- Bus priority measures 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.
- Making it much easier for **all** to travel by bus.
- Much simpler, co-ordinated integration with other transport modes.

Wider passenger representation issues arising from the GM consultation

2.2.10 In our further response in January 2021 we took the opportunity to reiterate our advocacy of passengers' general rights and input to the services that they use. We emphasised the need for passenger involvement in the creation and operation of franchised bus services, for example a particular ongoing requirement for passengers' views on routing, frequency and fares levels to be actively sought when changes are made.

2.2.11 We could not find any specific reference to passenger representation in the consultations other than in connection with consulting user organisations on how well the franchising scheme is working throughout its life as detailed above (paragraphs 2.2.5 and 2.2.6).

2.2.12 We had pointed to a reference in the Assessment tome (paragraph 7.4.4) to the importance of passengers knowing where they should go for information or to make comments or complaints. Currently complaints procedures regarding buses in Greater Manchester (and elsewhere for that matter) are not well publicised. There should be accessible information for passengers on buses and at other locations including bus stations explaining not only how to complain but also how to appeal if the complaint is not dealt with satisfactorily. TOWN would be well placed (again subject to funding) to deal with unresolved complaints about franchised bus services. London TravelWatch performs this role for London's franchised bus services.

2.2.13 We said that the alternative of falling back on Bus Users UK as the Appeals body would be unsatisfactory. Bus Users UK's complaints procedures are limited and attuned to a deregulated rather than franchised operation. ***It is not a statutory body.*** We understand that its terms of reference only permit it to deal with complaints from bus users regarding specific incidents or operational matters such as running to time, charging the correct fare and the behaviour of staff towards passengers. It cannot deal with commercial or operational matters such as the level of fares, the level of service provided, or the routes taken by buses

Future of Transport Rural Strategy

2.2.14 In February 2021 we responded to a DfT consultation on this subject. We felt some of the more esoteric suggestions for technological solutions such as e-bikes, e-scooters, drones and autonomous electric aircraft would not be suitable for many people in rural areas and their needs. Most rural public transport users would be happy with a regular bus.

2.2.15 We made a number of less fatuous suggestions which could give practical help to improving the current situation –

- Use of school transport in between school trips
- More co-operation/ co-ordination amongst the various public service (e.g. health associated) and goods delivery vehicles, etc.
- Open Community Transport services to all users and ensure their existence is well publicised nationally as well as locally to ensure maximum awareness.
- Improve publicity and information (e.g. fares) for existing services
- Improve integration amongst operators.

2.2.16. Funding for Local Transport Authorities (which are best placed to develop transport services in rural areas given their local knowledge and understanding) is of course a real stumbling block. We said that LTAs should be compelled by statute to apply Government funding to this sector by hypothecation, rather than just withdrawing it as a political gesture. We consider that the role for the private sector is extremely limited if it is expected to work on a commercial basis. For further commentary on bus funding issues see Section 3.2 below.

2.3 Rail Matters

Investment

2.3.1 In May 2020 we responded to the National Infrastructure Commission's consultation on Rail Needs Assessment for the Midlands and the North. We qualified our comments by referring to the post Covid 19 uncertainty and the difficulty of estimating the level of rail patronage over the next 1 to 3 years.

2.3.2 Conditional on passengers coming back we saw the need for a step by step approach to interim investment before the planned implementation of HS2 phase 2b and Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) – not likely until the 2040s. We remarked that there had been a stop-go to the investment in the railways of the North. Numerous proposals and plans for rail investment had been developed but had not proceeded in a coherent way.

2.3.3 We emphasised that further electrification was an essential priority and commended the Northern Sparks report published in 2015 by the North of England Electrification Task Force, recognising the significant benefits electrification would bring for passengers. Following the lack of progress since then we put forward the need for urgent action on full electrification of the North TransPennine, Lakes Line, Calder Valley, Liverpool to Manchester via Warrington and Southport/Kirkby to Salford Crescent routes as priorities. We took heart from Network Rail's Chief Executive Andrew Haines statement that: "We have to be bolder about demonstrating what electrification can do" and that the Government should "start soon and start progressively".

2.3.4 We stressed the importance of local service improvements and the need for more track capacity. A particular problem affecting both local and inter urban services in the North West and indeed the wider north of England is the Manchester bottleneck - the infamous Castlefield corridor. The capacity problems on the corridor have been made worse by the opening of the Ordsall

Chord. Under previous plans for the Manchester bottleneck, it was always proposed that improvements at Manchester Piccadilly and Oxford Road would complement the construction of the chord, but this has not happened.

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

Manchester Recovery Task Force

2.3.5 The real answer to the Castlefield corridor is of course investment as intimated above. However current initiatives are directed at service rationalisation to improve performance (we are talking about a theoretical non Covid world of course). In March 2021 we responded to a consultation from the MRTF a group set up by the DfT in conjunction with Network Rail and Transport for the North to seek ways of easing the congestion by reassessing the complex rail service patterns in and out of and across Manchester.

2.3.6 We had some concerns about this exercise at a time when rail travel was so depressed because of Covid 19 and it was very difficult to predict future demand and service patterns. We emphasised that the crux of the matter was the crying need for investment on the Castlefield corridor. Whilst the paper was overwhelmingly directed at optimising service patterns operationally, there was some reference to developing infrastructure interventions, but none would be available by 2022.

2.3.7 The paper set out 3 options for revised service patterns to take the pressure off the corridor. We put forward a fourth option which we suggested would preserve 12 paths per hour over the entire largely 2 track corridor between Piccadilly and Castlefield Junction (including one off peak freight path).

2.3.8 Part of the congestion issue is the incidence of through services to Manchester Airport. It must be remembered that Manchester is the third most heavily used airport in the UK and much investment has gone into increasing capacity at its station. Airline passengers with heavy luggage balk at changing trains and therefore we postulated the retention of an 8 or even 9 trains/hour option serving what we saw as the optimum destinations. This option would also retain better use of the Ordsall chord, include a through Airport service from Rochdale and the Calder Valley. The latter would fulfil demand from the centres of population on that route, not only to Manchester Airport, but also to south Manchester and onward connections.

2.3.9 We have some concerns about pathing and congestion issues on the Bolton route and we noted the potential of the Atherton line as a potential first-class alternative to that route. We affirmed our view that there is an all-day need to retain a service between Southport and South Manchester on the Atherton line with some intermediate calls. The Oxford Road/Piccadilly area and the opportunity for onward connections is an attraction for many passengers on this line.

2.3.10 At the time of writing the outcome is not yet known but there is appreciable political and local concern about the ramifications for individual routes.

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

Service levels

2.3.11 The Covid pandemic gave rise to a number of service reductions due to train crew shortages. An extreme example was the important branch line to Rose Hill Marple. This line and the associated Hyde Loop line were threatened with temporary closure for 3 months from September 2020. Following pressure from the local user groups and others, to which we added our support, this was averted with a very limited service being restored, mainly for schoolchildren.

2.3.12 In October 2020 the Friends of Rose Hill asked for our support for a comprehensive plan to enhance Rose Hill and associated services on a longer term basis. We submitted our own paper in support, commenting that Rose Hill station had long been treated as the 'poor relation' of services on the Manchester – New Mills (Goyt Valley) railway corridor. This had resulted in patronage not being developed to its potential over many decades. We also suggested that the time for a wider review of services on this corridor was overdue.

2.3.13 At the time of writing (July 2021), it appears that the full half hourly service to Rose Hill, which operated prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, has not yet been restored.

High Speed Rail (HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail)

2.3.14 We have always supported the concept of HS2 though with reservations about its positive effects on our region and integration with conventional services.

2.3.15 Despite escalating costs the Oakervee Review in February 2020 strongly advised against cancelling HS2, saying it would benefit the transport system and there was no "shovel-ready" alternative upgrade for the existing railways. Following this in May 2020 we responded to a consultation by the West Coast Partnership on high speed service development as it would affect our region.

2.3.16 In our response we gave an overall view of the markets and opportunities as we saw them in the North West. More generally we pointed out the unfortunate predilection for HS2 to plan terminating stations (e.g. Manchester) when through stations are operationally and commercially more flexible. We also emphasised that HS2 must be an integral part of the national rail network, offering good connections with conventional services, with fares in line with and interavailable with existing services.

2.3.17 We underlined the importance of keeping service levels on the existing West Coast Main Line at a good frequency between centres of population not served by HS2 in order to maintain connectivity. We particularly highlighted the

vital need to maintain through services with London serving the important markets of Lancashire and Cumbria the Lake District (thinking of Oxenholme and Penrith), particularly, as far as the latter is concerned, the leisure market.

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

2.3.18 In our response to the National Infrastructure Commission (see above) we referred to a paper produced in May 2020 by Greengauge 21 “Revisiting High Speed North”. We agreed with the paper’s view that there were serious problems to be addressed in the North’s rail network in the next 5 -10 years that could not wait for the flagship schemes of the 2nd phase of HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR).

2.3.19 We also supported the concept in the paper of a HS2 West – East oriented through underground station at Piccadilly as advocated by the Mayor of Greater Manchester. Together with a tunnel under central Manchester this would enable through fast NPR trains between North Wales/Chester, Liverpool, Blackpool, Barrow and Glasgow and a variety of destinations east of the Pennines. It would also be possible for some HS2 services to continue their journeys in that direction, hopefully on a high speed route. Importantly it would be the ultimate solution for relieving the congested Castlefield corridor. Interestingly Greengauge maintained that this new tunnel and station would not have to wait until the full phase 2b was completed.

2.3.20 Two further consultations on HS2 in December 2020 and Feb 2021 covered refinements on the Western Leg. The former proposed a connection between HS2 and the WCML north of Crewe. which we welcomed, and the latter a new platform at Crewe to help facilitate the handling of HS2 services at the station. We agreed that the reinstatement of platform 13 would be a good way of achieving this.

2.3.21 We continued to stress the importance of retaining through services with London and welcomed “the aim that, wherever it is feasible, all places with a direct London service will retain a broadly comparable or better service after HS2 Phases One and 2a open”. As cited above we have previously expressed concern that Penrith, Oxenholme, Warrington Bank Quay, Stockport and Wilmslow stations could lose their through services and that passengers would be forced to change trains when taking journeys to/from London. We affirmed that these important stations and their communities deserved a better service to the capital not worse.

Restoring lost rail links

2.3.22 In our response to the HOCTC inquiry into Major Transport Infrastructure Projects in January 2021 we noted that the government would deliver on its manifesto commitment to spend £500 million to restore transport services previously lost in the Beeching cuts of the 1960s. We understand that there has been a recent statement from Highways England that it intends to remove some redundant railway structures over the next 5 years for safety reasons. We trust this will not jeopardise any potential restorations of services.

2.3.23. Of the first 10 feasibility funded schemes which had been announced and which would provide a basis for decisions on further development there were two in our region - Bury-Heywood-Rochdale and Clitheroe to Hellifield. The latter, sponsored by Ribble Valley Borough Council, appears to be making good progress and will hopefully provide a direct key link from the huge Greater Manchester and Lancashire population centres to the iconic Settle Carlisle Railway.

2.3.24 We further noted that of the additional 15 proposals being provided further feasibility funding by the government the following were in our region - Tarporley station in Cheshire, reinstating links between Bolton, Radcliffe, and Bury and upgrading the South Fylde Line. We were somewhat disappointed that Skipton – Colne, the Burscough curves and Poulton – Fleetwood had not made the list thus far.

2.4 Light Rail

2.4.1 We have had little dealings with light rail other than to continue to extol its worthiness in urban transport settings. In our response to the HOCTC inquiry into Major Transport Infrastructure Projects in January 2021 we pointed out that past cancellation of major projects in Leeds, Liverpool and South Hampshire was a missed opportunity to install fully electrified systems and new light rail schemes should be strongly supported.

2.4.2 An overriding consideration with both light rail and tram-train schemes is the absolute necessity to integrate with other modes. This is still not ideal with the current Manchester Metrolink system, particularly as far as fares are concerned.

2.5 Consultations

2.5.1 Notwithstanding the lockdowns there were a healthy number of consultations for TOWN to respond to during the year, including

- *Rural Bus Services Inquiry (County Councils Network 14.5.20)* – see paragraphs 2.2.1 - 2.2.2 above
- *High Speed Service Development (West Coast Partnership 6.5.20)* – see paragraphs 2.3.14 – 2.3. 17 above.
- *Rail Needs Assessment for the Midlands and the North (National Infrastructure Commission 29.5.20)* – see paragraphs 2.3.1 – 2.3.4 above.
- *Coronavirus: Implications for Transport (HOCTC 18.6.20)* – see paragraphs 2.1.2 – 2.1.5 above
- *Decarbonisation of transport (DfT 31.8.20)* – we emphasised the important contribution that public transport could and should make towards targets of carbon reduction.
- *Reforming public transport after the pandemic (HOCTC 25.9.20)* - see paragraphs 2.1.6 – 2.1.10 above
- *Transforming Lancaster Travel (Lancashire County Council 04.12.20)* – we voiced our main concern to preserve and improve bus access in and around the City which suffers from acute traffic congestion. We also

mooted the possibility of a new station in the Oubeck area, south of the city, to serve the University and a new projected housing development.

- *HS2 Phase 2B Western Leg Design Refinement (DfT 11.12.20)* – see paragraphs 2.3.20 – 2.3.21 above.
- *Union Connectivity Review (DfT 29.12.20)* – we emphasised the need for better rail links with our region and Scottish destinations beyond Glasgow and Edinburgh, also the potential of the Settle – Carlisle route for Anglo Scottish journeys.
- *Major Transport Infrastructure Projects (HOCTC 15.01.21)* – we stressed the need to develop innovative and sustainable public transport as an alternative to the car, including a rigorous commitment to rail electrification and greater support for buses including enhanced priority measures.
- *Greater Manchester Bus Market Reform (GMCA 29.01.21)* - see paragraphs 2.2.3- 2.2.13 above.
- *Future of Transport Rural Strategy (DfT 15.02.21)* – see paragraphs 2.2.14 – 2.2.16 above.
- *HS2 Phase 2A West Midlands - Crewe (DfT 24.02.21)* – see paragraphs 2.3.20 - 2.3.21 above.
- *Manchester Recovery Task Force (DfT 09.03.21)* – see paragraphs 2.3.5 – 2.3.10 above.

3. Current Workstreams (2021/2022)

3.1 Conferences

3.1.1 We have held 3 condensed zoom conferences between March and June 2021, all focussed on the way back to normality after the pandemic.

3.1.2 The conference on 11th March 2021 - “How will rail recover from the pandemic” featured the following speakers, giving short presentations of 10 minutes or so –

- ***Chris Jackson, Regional Director, Northern Trains Limited,***
- ***Chris Nutton. Major Projects Director, Trans Pennine Express***
- ***Richard Scott, Partnership & Strategy Director, West Coast Partnership***

3.1.3 On 15th April we moved the focus to buses – “How will bus services recover from the pandemic”. Speakers were –

- ***Matt Goggins, Assistant Director Bus, Merseytravel***
- ***Alex Hornby, CEO TransDev, Blazefield***
- ***John Carr, Association of Transport Co-ordinating Authorities***
-

3.1.4 On 17th June we held to a similar theme for public transport as a whole – “The way back to normality for public transport”. Our three well informed speakers were –

- ***RT Hon. Norman Baker, Adviser, Campaign for Better Transport***
- ***Phil Haigh, Specialist Writer on Railways***

- **Mark Hodgkiss, Scheduled Bus Services Officer, Cumbria Country Council**

3.2 Buses

National Bus Strategy

3.2.1 Back in February 2020 we had welcomed the Prime Minister's announcement of a 5 year funding package worth £5 billion for bus services, recommending that much of this should be used to fund reinstating bus routes which had vanished in recent years due to cuts in Local Council funding.

3.2.2 We stressed that these routes included vital links in rural areas giving people access to jobs, education, healthcare and shops as well as early morning, evening and weekend services in all areas, essential for all those people in low paid jobs whose working hours are 9 to 5.

3.2.3 We said that achieving this would require the funding to be paid as revenue grants to Local Authorities and it should be ring fenced so it could only be spent on providing bus services

3.2.4 In March 2021, as a follow up to the Prime Minister's announcement in Feb 2020, the government launched the National Bus Strategy ("Bus Back Better"). Although the total funding package appeared to have fallen from £5 billion to £3 billion, we gave a cautious welcome to the strategy. We emphasised again that rural areas must benefit following the many bus routes which have vanished in recent years due to cuts in Local Council funding.

3.2.5 It became clearer that under the strategy Local Transport Authorities are being directed to produce a timescale to commit to greater involvement in buses, as per the following -

- A requirement to commit to an Enhanced Partnership with all bus operators by the end of June 2021 or begin the statutory process of franchising services. All operators will be required to co-operate with this.
- By the end of October 2021 each Local Transport Authority must publish a Bus Improvement Plan (to be updated annually)
- By April 2022 each Local Transport Authority will need to have an Enhanced Partnership in place, or be following the statutory process to decide whether to implement a franchising scheme, to access the new discretionary streams of bus funding.

3.2.6 This is a development that we support but will it result in a better sustainable deal for rural areas in particular? Funding issues as referred to in paragraph 2.2.16 above are likely to remain an issue and to what extent does this strategy encompass long term sustainable for loss making, socially desirable services?

3.2.7 We can't find any reference in the strategy document to consultation on its roll-out with passengers or their representatives. Following our zoom

conference on 17th June, Mark Hodgkiss promised that Cumbria County Council definitely wished to include user groups in discussions. He also aspired to aiming for more Bus User representation across the region.

3.2.8 We welcome the comments in the document on passenger representation and on complaints procedures, including a passengers charter and “mechanisms for redress at a local level and means to ensure these standards are met, which could include forums such as Bus Advisory Boards being set up”. Transport Focus is currently the statutory body representing bus passengers but unresolved complaints are dealt with by the Bus Appeals Body, run by Bus Users UK.

3.2.9 In paragraphs 2.2.12 and 2.2.13 above we set out the current unsatisfactory arrangements for dealing with passengers’ complaints through the Bus Appeals Body and we trust that the local forums envisaged in the strategy will take on this matter effectively. TOWNW would be very happy to contribute its experience in passenger representation and advise on complaints and redress matters. One simple step would be to provide “how to comment/ complain” information on board buses and at bus stations.

3.3 Rail & Integration

Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail

3.3.1 It is a long time since we responded to the Williams review of the structure of the rail industry (May 2019). At the time we had emphasised that the railways were not a true commercial organisation because of the enormous costs of operation, particularly for maintaining and renewing the unique infrastructure.

3.3.2 Our key view was that the rail industry needed to be restructured into a more co-ordinated entity, in particular bringing infrastructure control and operations much closer together. We welcomed the view of the Rail Delivery Group that there was a need for a new strategic body in charge of the whole industry.

3.3.3 We were concerned that, despite the review purporting to put passengers’ interests first, there appeared to be no mention of independent passenger representation in the consultation document. We advocated the restoration of the regional statutory bodies representing passengers which would be in line with a greater emphasis on an increasing role for local stakeholders as outlined above and such bodies as Transport for the North. We argued that TOWNW would be well placed to fill this role.

3.3.4 In May 2021 the government at last published its resultant white paper, the Williams – Shapps Plan for Rail, the creation of “Great British Railways”. We gave a broad welcome to the following elements of the plan –

- The restructuring of the rail industry into a more co-ordinated entity, in particular bringing infrastructure control and operations much closer together, bringing better integration and passenger benefits.

- Fares – simplification, pay as you go, flexible season tickets and continuing regulation.
- More local control and input from local stakeholders including Community Rail Partnerships.
- The commitment to strengthened passenger representation with an increased regional presence (something we had recommended).

3.3.5 We were somewhat disappointed with the failure to subsume train fleet provision into Great British Railways (GBR), leaving this key role and its strategic implications in the hands of the private sector. There is still much detail to be finalised and it will be a long process of transition. However, it is a significant step forward which we will be monitoring closely, always with passengers interests foremost. One key factor will be ensuring key investment levels to increase capacity, modernise the railway and attract passengers.

3.3.6 A further important consideration will be about co-ordination of the passenger network given that private operators will continue to run service groups under contract arrangements rather than a franchise as formally. Operationally there is a danger that this will not look very different to franchising and proper co-ordination and other organisational issues will not follow but still be exacerbated by fragmentation.

Engineering work disruption

3.3.7 One area that does cry out for greater co-ordination is the arrangements for passenger journeys when disruption resulting from engineering work takes place. We have previously drawn attention to fragmented arrangements for the management of rail replacement services, with each TOC organising its own coaches, leading to sub-optimal use of the coaches and duplication of personnel. We would hope that the creation of GBR will pave the way for one overall organisation to provide the coordinating staff and manage the whole rail replacement operation.

3.3.8 We have long campaigned for leisure travel to take a higher priority when rail engineering work and associated disruption to passengers' journeys is planned. In the North West we have what is probably the foremost area of scenic beauty in England – the Lake District National Park recently given international recognition, quite rightly, as a world heritage site. Its main rail link between Oxenholme and Windermere sadly does not cater well for the crowds of tourists visiting the Park, in spite of the best efforts of the local user group and community rail partnership.

3.3.9 This part of the world has and is bedevilled by engineering work on the WCML especially at holiday times. Given that most passengers on feeder WCML and other local services are primarily leisure travellers this can hit very hard. The May Spring Bank holiday 2021 saw some disruption in the area though this was not as intrusive as at other Bank Holidays. The fine weather weekend was a very busy one showing that some passengers at least are returning to rail in large numbers. Pleasingly, Northern did safeguard the use of 3-car trains on the Windermere Branch in spite of some ongoing problems

with the new rolling stock. Interestingly on the same weekend we understood that the Furness line had severe overcrowding problems exacerbated by a coinciding of Cartmel races and a Cross Morecambe Bay walk.

3.3.10 We understand that Network Rail is committed to opening up the network in future to try to avoid the predilection of disrupting the important leisure business at holiday times. We look to next year for some evidence of this and further ahead the involvement of GBR as a sensible guiding hand in these matters.

3.3.11 Another area that GBR should give direction on is the long-standing concerns about keeping passengers on trains as much as possible during disruption. We have in the past emphasised and reiterated that research by Transport Focus has shown that wherever possible passengers are prepared to accept a longer journey time keeping on a train to avoid using a replacement bus or coach. In recent times, TOCs have seemed reluctant to use diversionary rail routes to circumvent line blockages.

3.3.12 In our part of the world, for example, we have for many years decried the lack of use of the Settle to Carlisle line when the West Coast main line is blocked between Preston and Carlisle. Years of engagement with train operators and government ministers on the subject has been well documented in our previous reports. Suffice to say that cost considerations have been a fundamental part of the reluctance to divert trains. Will GBR act in passengers' best interests in this respect in the future. We await with baited breath!

Electrification

3.3.13 We referred in paragraph 2.3.3 to the Northern Sparks report and further electrification priorities. Oxenholme to Windermere should have been electrified years ago, and indeed it was assumed it would be completed in that 20215 report. However there has been typical obfuscation and no progress made. Currently the vogue is directed to electric battery train operation. But there are disadvantages - less flexibility of operation and the location of and time spent charging. As one of our Directors has observed, electrifying the line would enable any train to come to Windermere, whereas with the battery trains only those with the equipment could be used.

3.3.14 In September 2021 a welcome announcement promised rail electrification between Wigan and Bolton. This is essentially good news and hopefully a step towards the electrification of the lines from Salford Crescent to Hindley via Atherton and indeed beyond Wigan to Southport and Kirkby, the third priority in the Northern Sparks report. We do have some concerns about the price tag of £78 million and have argued elsewhere about the need for more cost effective methods of implementing scheme, following the grossly over expensive Great Western electrification.

Cheshire Best Kept Stations (CBKS)

3.3.15 TOWNW has been asked to carry out the judging of large stations in Cheshire as part of the CBKS exercise that Chris Dale was involved with

previously. We were given to understand that CBKS is considering changing the name of this award to the Chris Dale TravelWatch Award, or something similar, to commemorate Chris's work. TWNW members assisted in the process by carrying out the judging of the 11 large stations in Cheshire.

Integration

3.3.16 TWNW recognises the Importance of multi modal integration - essential to encourage shift from cars and we have continually emphasised our approach over the years. Ideally there should be much closer co-operation between all modes of public transport as on the continent, but in this country this is not a funding priority. In the absence of a proper policy on integration car owners should be encouraged to use park and ride or rail for the majority of their journeys. Regrettably, many station car parks in our region have been way below required capacity, discouraging potential travellers.

3.3.17 Williams – Shapps promises better integration with other transport services with links to the National Bus Strategy. The GBR website and app is to become a means of accessing all public transport services, showing bus and light rail information and able to sell integrated tickets across different services to support easy journeys. The report also states that "...better integration with other transport services and consistent customer service will help to increase use of rail services, make journeys easier and support local regeneration right across the country" This all sounds brilliant but the proof of the pudding.....!

4. Plans for 2021/23

4.1 We do hope will be able to return to our normal pattern of 3 conferences per year as soon as possible. At the time of writing we are planning a face to face to face conference in October. We intend to feature presentations and discussion on relevant transport issues and of course opportunities will be presented for users to make representations on any public transport issue.

4.2 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.

4.3 The following areas of work are being considered for 2022/2023 -

- Bus services - information and quality, accessibility including bus stops.
- Monitoring of the rail passenger experience including on train, station facilities and modal integration, engineering disruption (including the quality of replacement road services) and connections at interchanges.
- Continued liaison with all rail operators 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.
- The availability and accuracy of journey planning and multi modal information on websites and on the ground.
- Community Transport

4.4 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.

4.5 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 **David Butterworth**. David is a retired senior teacher in secondary education, living in Clitheroe. He was secretary of Ribble Valley Rail, which successfully campaigned over a period of eight years for the re-introduction in 1994 of a passenger service on the Ribble Valley Line. For many years he was a member of the North West TUCC, later the Rail Passengers Committee. For a while David was national treasurer for the Railway Development Society (now RailFuture) and a board member of the Settle-Carlisle Railway Development Company. From its inception he has been an active director of TWNW.

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 36 years in the railway and tramway industries, including 14 years with Transport for Greater Manchester, he has considerable experience with transport management, customer service, community rail initiatives and consultancy.

Directors who served on the Board during 2020/21 –

The late Chris Dale	Colin Kennington
David Butterworth	John Owen
Malcolm Conway	Richard Rollins
David Culshaw	Robert Talbot
John Hart	Tim Young
Chris Holmes	Tony Young

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

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

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 2020/21

DETAILED PROFIT AND LOSS ACCOUNT YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2021

	2021		2020
	£		£
TURNOVER	1100		4993
COST OF SALES			
Administration fees	150		1400
Totals	<u>150</u>		<u>1400</u>
GROSS PROFIT	950		3593
OVERHEADS			
Travel and subsistence	0		179
Conferences & Meetings	0		3110
Office costs	238		451
Accommodation	2520		2440
Insurance	236		234
Web hosting/ subscriptions	104		95
Publicity	29		60
Totals	3127		6569
	-2177		-2976
OTHER OPERATING INCOME			
Members income	1010		845
Sundry donations	470		1318
Totals		<u>1480</u>	2163
OPERATING PROFIT/LOSS		-697	-813
Interest receivable		5	12
PROFIT/(LOSS) ON ORDINARY ACTIVITIES		-692	-801

Appendix C Membership (at July 2021)

Organisation/Name

Blackburn & District CTC
Blackpool & Fylde Rail Users Association (RUA)
Bus Users UK
Campaign for Better Transport Lancashire
Chinley & Buxworth Transport Group
Cumbria Coast Rail Users Group (RUG)
Friends of Eccles Station
Friends of Hindley Station
Friends of Reddish South Station
Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line
Goyt Valley RUA
Kendal & District Bus Users Group
Lakes Line RUG
Lancaster & District Bus Users Group
Lancaster & Skipton RUG
Merseytravel
Mid Cheshire RUG
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
Roma Patten
Malcolm Richardson
Ian Stuart
Ian Watson
Keith Whitmore
Tim Young
Tony Young