

TravelWatch NORTHWEST

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Integration Between Rail and Bus at Rail Stations

A Report on Guidance and Convenience for Passengers



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

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Integration Between Rail and Bus at Rail Stations

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(Cover photo of Maghull Interchange; Chris Dale)

1. Introduction & Background

1.1 Integration is a fashionable term in transport circles, has been so for many years and continues to be aspired to into the future. To take two quotes from the Greater Manchester Transport Strategy 2040 consultation document – “A major barrier to enabling people and goods to travel more sustainably is the lack of integration across the different parts of the transport network” and “Over the period to 2040, we will stop viewing different modes of transport as separate networks, with individual asset management, service planning, and fares and ticketing regimes, and instead plan our transport system as a single, highly-connected entity that all customers can move through seamlessly”.

1.2 We decided to examine the reality of provision of guidance for passengers at the present time when changing from train to bus at rail stations and how easy it is to do this.

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

2. Methodology

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

2.2 The following table lists all the stations surveyed

Stations	Footfall 2015/16 (source ORR)	Operator
Accrington	433,618	Northern
Altrincham	507,592 (Rail only)	Northern/Metrolink
Ashton-Under-Lyne	361,946	Northern
Barrow-In-Furness	631,364	Northern
Birkenhead Central	965,262	Merseyrail
Birkenhead Hamilton Square	2,017,478	Merseyrail
Blackburn	1,159,802	Northern
Blackpool North	1,764,014	Northern
Blackpool South	126,162	Northern
Bolton	2,866,316	Northern
Burnley Central	128,614	Northern
Burnley Manchester Road	393,304	Northern
Bury	?	Metrolink
Carlisle	1,833,028	Virgin W Coast
Chester	4,620,230	Arriva Trains Wales
Clitheroe	240,112	Northern
Colne	96,946	Northern
Crewe	2,843,396	Virgin W Coast
East Didsbury	?	Metrolink
Kendal	215,398	Northern
Kirkby (Merseyside)	2,356,170	Merseyrail
Lancaster	2,033,538	Virgin W Coast
Liverpool South Parkway	1,893,958	Merseyrail
Macclesfield	1,614,316	Virgin W Coast
Maghull	1,812,534	Merseyrail
Morecambe	235,198	Northern
Oldham Central	?	Metrolink
Ormskirk	2,163,374	Merseyrail
Oxenholme Lake District	521,768	Virgin W Coast
Penrith	498,428	Virgin W Coast
Preston	4,621,590	Virgin W Coast
Rochdale	1,134,418	Northern
Southport	4,147,064	Merseyrail
St Helens Central	1,140,198	Northern
Stalybridge	1,128,900	TPennine Express
Stockport	3,586,032	Virgin W Coast
Warrington Bank Quay	1,110,400	Virgin W Coast
Warrington Central	1,801,788	Northern
Wigan North Western	1,380,716	Virgin W Coast
Wigan Wallgate	1,576,106	Northern
Windermere	419,710	Northern
Workington	184,880	Northern

3. Results

3.1 The following table shows for each station where **clear, easy to find** information about bus stops/ stations was provided and also where bus stops/ stations were located adjacent (within 200 metres) to the station.

Station	Platform posters	Platform signage	Entrance posters	Entrance signage	Adj.bus stops	Adj.bus station
Accrington	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Altrincham	NO	NO	NO	NO		YES
Ashton	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Barrow	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO
Blackburn	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Blackpool North	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
Blackpool South	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Bolton	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES
Burnley Central	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO
Burnley Manchester Rd	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Clitheroe	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES
Colne	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO
Kendal	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO
Morecambe	NO	NO	YES	NO		YES
Rochdale	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
St Helens Central	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO
Warrington Central	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES
Wigan Wallgate	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Windermere	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	
Workington	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO
Birkenhead Central	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
B'head Hamilton Sq.	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO
Kirkby (Merseyside)	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
Liverpool S. Parkway	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Maghull	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES
Ormskirk	NO	YES	YES	YES		YES
Southport	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Carlisle	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
Crewe	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO
Lancaster	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Macclesfield	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
Oxenholme	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
Penrith	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
Preston	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
Stockport	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO
Warrington B Quay	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
Wigan NW	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Chester	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
Stalybridge	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES
Bury	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES
E. Didsbury	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	
Oldham Central	NO	NO			NO	NO

Key – Northern stations, Merseyrail stations, Virgin West Coast stations, Arriva Trains Wales station, TransPennine Express station, Metrolink stations

3.2 Northern Rail



(photo John Owen)

3.2.1 Information on platforms – just 9 out of the 20 stations had posters on platforms giving information about bus services. These were standard “Continuing

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your journey” or “Onward Travel Information” posters with maps. In just 5 cases were these deemed to be clear often because of obscure location of the poster(s). There was little in the way of signage from platforms to buses (only found on 2 out of the 20 stations).

3.2.2 Information in concourse/ at station entrance – it was good to find posters at 15 out of the 20 locations. Signage was again lacking with just 6 out of the 20 having clear signage to buses. Best stations for information were Bolton, Clitheroe and Windermere where bus services are adjacent.

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

3.2.4 Bus stations – Altrincham, Bolton, Clitheroe, Morecambe, Warrington Central & Windermere have bus stations within 200 metres. At 6 stations (Barrow, Blackpool South, Colne, Rochdale, Wigan Wallgate, Workington) there was a longish walk to the bus station (11-20 mins). Waiting and other facilities were mostly good or fair and comprehensive timetable information was available in the main. Again there was no real time information.

3.2.5 Car Parking – most stations had car parks (16), 9 with free car parking. Over half were full.

3.2.6 Specific comments

- Blackpool North – “very hard to find any info in concourse, the bus stop outside the station is served by one bus every 30 minutes but has no information or shelter. Buses can be seen passing on the road above but have no idea how far the bus stops are. They are about 50 yards away and they have timetables at them.”
- Warrington Central – “the only sign is a council finger post showing the way to the bus station, but this cannot be seen from the station concourse”.
- Kendal – “signs with bus information were removed due to having TPE’s name on. One sign provided by Kendal Bid with a Town Map on says it is 7 minutes walk to the bus station”.
- Clitheroe – “Bus interchange visible from station booking office. Clitheroe is a good example of bus/rail integration.”

3.3 Virgin West Coast

3.3.1 Information on platforms – only 2 out of the 10 stations had posters and at one of those (Warrington) only on the southbound platform. Only 2 had any signage to buses and at one of these (Wigan NW) only on the southbound platforms.

3.3.2 Information in concourse / at station entrance – only 5 stations had posters, mainly reasonably well sited. At Crewe there was a clear sign just for buses to the town centre and bus station. At no less than 7 stations no signage was provided, though at Penrith, Wigan NW and Lancaster bus stops are adjacent to the station.

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

- Macclesfield (100 metres distant) - no information about this stop at the station;
- Carlisle (50 – 250 metres distant) - nothing to indicate which of the 7 stops to use.
- Warrington Bank Quay – one bus stop immediately outside the station no longer in use and one 50 metres away with confusing information. Other stops were 400 metres away.

There was no real time information at any bus stops.

3.3.4 Bus stations – no station had an adjacent bus station with 6 entailing a walk of more than 11 minutes. 7 bus stations were deemed to have good or fair facilities but without any real time information.

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

3.3.6 Other general & specific comments – The Virgin stations surveyed were easily the most deficient in lack of information about bus interchange at station exit/entrance areas. For example -

- Carlisle - the lack of information at the station about bus services was easily the worst that the surveyor had come across anywhere.
- Macclesfield - there was no information clearly displayed anywhere at the station which would inform a stranger to the area how to connect to bus services.
- Preston – “the word ‘Buses’ does not appear anywhere in the main entrance area. The bus station is 800 metres from the railway station. It is possible to move between bus and rail station by bus but there is not a dedicated shuttle and the services that do cover both are not obvious. The quickest and easiest way to get from the railway station to the bus station should be prominently displayed in the railway station’s main entrance area.”
- Oxenholme – in complete contrast had good poster and signage provision and bus timetables in the northbound waiting room.

3.4 Merseyrail

3.4.1 Information on platforms – 5 out of the 7 stations surveyed had no posters or signage on platforms. Maghull and Southport did have clear posters (two standard Merseytravel style posters one describing the locality with a map and the other “Where to Catch your Bus” with map locating the nearest bus stops).

3.4.2 Information in concourse/ at station entrance – two of the 7 stations - Kirkby and Maghull - had no posters or signage, although at Maghull the bus station is adjacent.

3.4.3 Bus stops/ bus stations – all stations had bus stops (or in the case of Liverpool South Parkway, Maghull & Ormskirk bus stations) within 200 metres. At Kirkby the bus station is 1 mile away though there are frequent bus services between the railway station and the bus station throughout the day. No real time information at any bus stop/ station.

3.4.4 Car Parking – no dedicated station parking at Birkenhead Central, Hamilton Square and Southport though at the latter the reporter found numerous pay car parks close by offering plenty of spaces. At the other 4 stations visited the car parks were full.

3.5 Others

Chester (operated by Arriva Trains Wales)

3.5.1 Information – no posters or signage on platforms or in the station concourse area at this busy station.

3.5.2 Bus stops/ bus station – there are stops just a few yards away. The bus station however is over a mile distant with no linking bus service from the station. No real time information at either bus stops or the bus station.

3.5.3 Car parking – a large car park which was full at the time of the visit (Wed pm in November).

Stalybridge (operated by TPE)

3.5.4 Information – clear posters and signage on platform 4 and destination finder with location of bus stops and bus station here and also in concourse.

3.5.5 Bus stops/station – bus stops visible from station entrance. Bus station 150 metres away with destination finder and map showing rail station. No real time information at bus stops or bus station.

3.5.6 Car Parking – very small station car park (full) and at least 60 spaces in an adjacent pay and display car park.

Manchester Metrolink

3.5.7 Bus stops/stations - three Metrolink stations were visited – Bury Interchange, East Didsbury and Oldham Central. Bury Interchange benefits from the adjacent bus station which is now showing a general run down appearance with shabby toilets and a permanently closed buffet. East Didsbury benefits from bus stops a short distance away, though signing to them at the station could be clearer. Road works near Oldham Central rendered the nearest bus stops out of use when the visit was made. There were no directions to the bus station, other than shown on a map of the town centre.

3.5.8 Car Parking – at Bury this was free to Metrolink customers only. There were about 150 spaces, full at the time of visit (15.00 Thursday 27th October). East Didsbury had a large free car park which was full. No car park at Oldham Central, though there is a park and ride at Oldham Mumps a short distance away.

4. Conclusions & Recommendations

4.1 At a time when rail passengers are increasing in number and more of them are frustrated in finding a space to park their car at a rail station the availability of integration between rail and bus should be of increasing importance. This small survey has looked at one aspect of integration – how easy it is to change from train to bus. Equally the reverse journey, changing from bus to train would bear similar investigation especially at bus stops/ bus stations relatively remote from rail stations. At most of the stations we visited there **was** information to be found about where to catch a bus and it was evident that strides have been taken to promote the opportunity to interchange to bus.

4.2 However the ready accessibility of such information varied considerably. Virgin West Coast stations were particularly poor, with no less than 5 out of the 10 stations visited having no discernible information anywhere on the station about the availability and proximity of bus services. From the limited survey, stations in PTE areas (Merseyside and Greater Manchester) did not appear to be better provided than those in the Shire or Unitary Counties.

4.3 **We recommend** that train & station operators and where appropriate Local Transport Authorities, Transport for Greater Manchester and Merseytravel undertake a comprehensive review of all stations in our region to assess the provision of this information. This review should aspire to maximising as far as possible the accessibility, standard and appropriateness of information at stations relating to the availability and location of onward bus service facilities.

4.4 This should include an assessment/ reassessment of

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

4.5 For more information about TravelWatch NorthWest visit –

www.travelwatch-northwest.org.uk

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