

***Winner of CILT award for best practice in passenger transport (2013)  
promoting quality public transport.....***

## **CONFERENCE REPORT**

**Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> February 2020, The Storey, Lancaster**

**Conference kindly supported by the Rail Industry and the  
Leeds - Morecambe (Bentham line) Community Rail Partnership**

### **1. Welcome and Introduction**

The Chairman, Chris Dale, welcomed delegates to Lancaster and expressed thanks for the support of the rail industry and the Bentham Line Community Rail Partnership. He referred to the problems that Northern Rail and TransPennine Express had been experiencing in recent months and the effect on passengers. Northern Rail had been taken into public ownership effective from 1<sup>st</sup> March to be operated by the government. However, some progress has been made in agreements with drivers to enable a more consistent Sunday service. Network Rail was also under some investigation for its poor performance in completing infrastructure projects.

Since the North West Bus debate in October TOWNW has responded to Greater Manchester's proposals on bus franchising. On balance the proposed Franchising Scheme was supported although TOWNW had concerns about the costs involved and the need for government to honour its pledge on this key consideration. TOWNW looked for franchising to 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 (see also below).
- 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.

### **2. Welcome to Lancaster**

***Mayor of Lancaster, Cllr David Whittaker***

The Mayor warmly welcomed TravelWatch NorthWest to Lancaster and thanked the organisation for choosing to hold the Conference in the City. He commended

TWNW, Rail User Groups and Community Rail Partnerships for the excellent and important work they carry out. He referred to the Eden Project being planned for Morecambe and the need for better public transport access to accommodate the expected influx of visitors. Finally, he recommended delegates visit the attractions of Lancaster.

### **3. Transforming Rail Services in the North (Part 1)** ***Chris Jackson, Regional Director, Northern Rail***

The previous Northern Rail franchise had run from 2004 until 2016 and had been forecast to be a “steady state” operation with no growth. However, it had witnessed massive growth during this period resulting in capacity difficulties. Arriva had been selected to operate the franchise for Northern Rail in 2015 and in the last year growth had continued by a further 8%. Rolling stock had been inherited from the previous operator but much was in need of replacement and total refurbishment. Stated objectives of the company were to help stimulate economic growth, modernise the rolling stock fleet and enable better connections and access to work and social engagements.

The May 2018 timetable change introduced an extra 2000 services but had to be hastily re-written due to the late delivery of electrification projects by Network Rail which was later proved to be underfunded to meet its targets. Delays in the arrival of new rolling stock also affected the delivery of the timetable. In June 2018 a temporary timetable was introduced to cope with the constraints placed on the company and stabilise services. Consequently, passengers lost faith in the company as they suffered many cancellations and overcrowded services.

The delay in delivery of new trains affected numerous services as drivers and staff had to complete over 11,000 days of training in 2019 resulting in reductions in operational availability and many consequent cancellations. A further 4500 days are still required during 2020 but it is hoped this will be completed by summer.

63 of the 101 new trains are now in operation, with 52 in passenger service. Reliability is improving but “bedding in” may take a little while longer. 6 coach trains are now operating the Blackpool – Manchester Airport services via the Bolton corridor and 70% of the existing fleet has been refurbished. 14 digital trains are in operation and a bid for 17 additional 323 Units to add to the current 3 has been submitted for 2022. However, this depends on new train arrival in the West Midlands. The 8 bi-mode 769 Units will be in operation on the Southport – Stalybridge/Alderley Edge routes from May. The withdrawal of Pacer trains began towards the end of last year and they will be totally removed from service in a few weeks.

The May 2020 timetable will feature improved journey times utilising the new trains’ capability as well as some additional route services. However, challenges remain as congestion is a major issue through the Manchester Castlefield corridor. This is now accommodating 15 trains per hour, 2 more than capacity, and it exports congestion throughout the network. A debate over solutions has to take place to either reduce frequency or increase train lengths.

£11 million is being spent on station improvements including 30 platform extensions and the opening of Warrington West last December.

Commercial ticketing activities have been taking place including:

- 10p Flash Sales
- Advance purchase – increased by 60% since 2018
- “Let’s Go” Media campaign
- £10 Flat fare journeys with regional newspaper campaign
- “My Cumbria” card concessions
- Penalty fares on 90% of routes

£250,000 per year is being allocated to support Community Rail which with Station Adopters, is seen as a key set of partnerships.

Springs Branch depot at Wigan is opening imminently to provide maintenance and servicing to add to the facilities at Newton Heath, Ardwick, and Allerton. This set of depots will enable better spread of servicing centres throughout the network.

Industrial relations continue to make progress. A deal to agree Sunday working arrangements has been reached with ASLEF and progress is being made on DCO of train doors.

From 1<sup>st</sup> March operations will pass to the Operator of Last Resort and the company will be titled Northern Trains Ltd. Other future challenges and events include:

- Williams Review
- Network Rail Master Plan
- Completion of new train programme
- Alternative fuel studies
- Infra-structure challenges
- Identification of crowding “hotspots” using technology
- Further station improvements

In subsequent discussion the following issues were raised:

- TVM failures and visibility due to glare plus lack of audible service – still in development but progress being made. Undertook to investigate further.
- Additional services to Eden Project at Morecambe – capacity issues so no quick fix but open to discussion.
- Need for total rail industry to communicate – Williams Report will be key.

#### **4. Transforming Rail Services in the North (Part 2)**

***Luke Gardner, Permanent Timetable Manager, TransPennine Express***

TPE’s new train fleet was launched at Lime Street on 22 November 2019. However, delays in the arrival of train units has resulted in poor performance throughout the winter. The need for driver and staff training on the new trains has resulted in staff availability falling short of requirements resulting in consequent cancellations. An emergency timetable for the Liverpool – Manchester - Newcastle – Edinburgh route

was implemented in January to relieve pressure, but this will return to normal operation from 17<sup>th</sup> February.

The proposed May 2018 timetable change could not be achieved due to Network Rail's delays in infra-structure upgrades resulting in the need for re-planning at short notice. The congestion being felt from the constraints of the Castlefield corridor caused delays throughout the network.

The December 2018 timetable was amended and featured the Leeds – Manchester stopping service to be split at Huddersfield to achieve a better service. It also featured increased turnaround periods at terminating stations to compensate for delay, and the re-routing of Anglo – Scottish via Bolton from Spring 2019.

The December 2019 timetable introduced the new train fleet, but the different characteristics of the trains had to be compensated for. This included end door loading requiring an extra 30 second dwell time at stations, 125 mph running between York & Darlington and the inability to interwork with other train types.

Services have begun between Liverpool & Glasgow with 3 trains per day operated currently by 185 units, but these will be replaced with 397 units from December 2020. Additional stops at Lockerbie have been introduced. On the Manchester – Sheffield route all peak and weekend services will be double units. Manchester – Hull services will now call at Mosley as well as other stops during the peak and turnaround timings have been extended to allow more reliability. A 15-minute frequency is now in place between Manchester Victoria and Leeds and, as some stopping patterns on this route have proved unpopular, some amendments are being planned, including the reinstatement of Stalybridge stops. Additionally, some Middlesbrough services have been extended to Redcar.

In subsequent discussion the following issues were raised:

- The reason 3 different train units have been procured is due to manufacturing capability to achieve the earliest possible delivery of the fleet.
- Capacity at Leeds will hopefully be relieved by additional coaches and higher frequencies.
- Paper timetables availability and distribution to be investigated in line with demand.
- Rough riding of new trains is an issue currently under engineering review.
- Noise issues with Class 68 locomotives being reviewed.
- Lack of double 350 units on Scottish services a temporary issue caused by cascade to WMR and will be relieved by new train introduction.
- Edinburgh via ECML is a franchise condition provides for passengers from cross Pennine stations.
- Bolton calls to be amended when dwell time allowance is in timetable.

## **5. Points of View**

The following issues were raised in the Points of View session:

West Coast Main Line Rail replacement coaches and potential for using Settle & Carlisle route as a diversion. Avanti WC currently does not have rolling stock availability to do this but will reconsider.

Opportunities for Avanti WC and FTPE to work together on bus replacements and harmonized fares. Separate companies but will be trying to work together as much as possible whilst respecting the franchise competition rules. Looking at Oxenholme turnaround possibilities.

PSVR regulations has made an impact on operators due to vehicle availability leading to nervousness and challenges within the industry. Derogation applied until 1<sup>st</sup> March and RDG is discussing.

Connectivity improvements from WCML always a challenge and in constant discussion and review between TOC's but no easy wins.

Ticketing complexity and availability driven by market but always under review.

Easing of services through Castlefield corridor will be driven by business cases but may require some franchise amendments.

“Train Station” v. “Railway Station”? Call for plain English description to be used.

## **6. Open Access to Blackpool**

***Chris Hanks, Timetable Strategy Manager, Grand Central Rail***

Open Access operators are not a franchise and operate to their own specifications. They are regulated by ORR and must prove that they are bringing new passengers to the railway but must be totally commercial, not receiving any financial support. They are required to invest in trains and stations, pay for track access and offer alternative destinations to competitors. Other OA operators currently applying for routes are Virgin (Euston – Liverpool) and Grand Union (Euston – Stirling and Paddington – Cardiff).

Grand Central has operated Open Access services between Kings Cross and Sunderland since 2007 adding a Bradford service in 2010. It was bought by Arriva in 2011. Currently it operates 18 weekday services, 10 of which use Class 180 Adelante units and competes with LNER and Hull Trains on the routes. It was voted the best long-distance operator in 2019 with 94% satisfaction in NRPS. It is also highly regarded as offering extremely good value for money.

From May 2020 Grand Central will commence operations between Euston and Blackpool, in competition with Avanti WC, and will offer 5 return services per weekday (4 at weekends) calling at Poulton le Fylde, Preston, Nuneaton and Milton Keynes. A phased introduction will see the full service come into being in late summer. Rolling stock will be delivered by the end of March and consist of 5 Mk4 coaches powered by a 110mph Class 90 locomotive. Driver training is currently underway.

GC will invest £1.2 million in stations along the route, including better booking facilities, waiting facilities, car parks, toilets and lighting and will get involved in any future plans to redevelop Preston. It currently has 80 volunteers working as station Ambassadors, who

assist passengers, and tend to general housekeeping. It will seek more for its new routes. It will also be offering new employment opportunities in Blackpool.

GC has a very good reputation and is appreciated by the towns and communities it serves. It exhibits a brand of looking after the basics, offering a human touch, straight forward value, belief in making things better and making journeys memorable. It prides itself on having friendly staff, loyalty to its employees, passengers and those suffering social exclusion and disadvantage. It will also offer loyalty discounts, customer choice and community engagement.

In subsequent discussion the following issues were raised:

- Remaining capacity on the WCML is limited but GC was able to get in early to procure the required paths.
- Possibility of through services from NW to South coast and West Country will be considered but presents a difficult business case.
- Financial security of parent company following press speculation has led to a need to prove resilience.
- Predatory activities of competing TOC's must always be countered by good marketing, sales and promotion.
- Access issues, particularly blind and partially sighted under constant review.
- GC will operate offering both its own promotional fares and inter-availability fares and will be looking at promotional fares between intermediate stations.

## **7. The New West Coast Operator**

***Jason Nash, Head of Performance, Avanti West Coast***

Avanti West Coast has now been operating WCML services for 2 months having taken over the franchise from Virgin. The franchise will run until 2031 and also run the HS2 services from 2026. It will be offering some extended services in due course and a major uplift from 2022 will see 263 extra services. New destinations will include Walsall, Gobowen and Liverpool will receive an extra hourly train.

The Pendolino train fleet is to receive a £180 million refurbishment and will offer more standard class seats with the conversion of 1 1<sup>st</sup> class coach in the current configuration. The Voyager fleet will be replaced by a new bi mode fleet of trains and all trains will have a new look and improved accommodation with additional luggage space, better toilets, more comfortable seats designed "off railway" and new carpets. An easier to understand ticketing system will be introduced, as will faster free WiFi connections and there will be a major effort to reduce the carbon footprint. Additionally, Avanti WC will offer good Value for Money and improved journey experiences.

Engagement with stakeholders will be enhanced and 7 Regional Growth Managers, (2 for the North) will be appointed to carry this through and become the contact point. Community Rail Partnerships are being financially supported and engagement with them will improve.

Stations will have a regeneration plan and will feature improved and additional facilities. Clothes changing facilities will be available at 4 stations on the network.

Avanti WC will work to shape the HS2 services and will run them from 2026. The proposed introduction will be in 3 phases, firstly London to Birmingham, second to Manchester and Leeds and third to onward destinations.

A working collaboration with Network Rail has been formed to address engineering challenges and issues to benefit passengers.

In subsequent discussion the following issues were raised:

- Specific seat booking is to be reintroduced shortly.
- Better clarity and consistency of on train announcements of approaching destinations and reductions in general overbearing messages will be considered.
- Sustainable travel to/from stations to be considered.
- Delay repay problems being resolved.
- RNIB input to station planning welcomed.
- Preston station remodelling a major and challenging issue but under discussion.
- Unreserved seat coach currently limited but under review.
- Warrington BQ frontage and car park needs remodelling and extending, and this will be considered through Regional Manager stakeholder system.
- The team is engaged with industry to address suicide attempts.
- Considering reconfiguration of seating to achieve optimum alignment with windows.

## **8. Prospects for CrossCountry**

***David Jones, Stakeholder Liaison Manager, CrossCountry***

The original franchise for CrossCountry was awarded as a no growth contract from 2007 – 2016. In 2016 a Direct Award was applied by the DfT to extend the franchise period until October 2019, then extended for a further 12 months. As yet no decision has been taken by DfT on the future. The consultation addressed capacity, range of destinations and connectivity but announcements are currently stalled awaiting the Williams report.

Passenger numbers are increasing significantly, and the company is hoping for a long-term extension to the franchise, following the Williams Review in order that it can develop investment plans to meet the demands of its market.

In subsequent discussion the following issues were raised:

- In journey reservations were felt to be unpopular but, in reality, few complaints have been received. Train Managers are trained to remedy issues on board.
- Potential for train lengthening will depend on future investment following DfT award.
- Through trains from Scotland via WCML to South coast and West Country are desired. Virgin was against splitting the Scotland - WCML - South Coast / South West through trains in 2007. The decision was entirely DfT's.
- Rumoured transfer of 170 units is untrue. All units being retained.
- Difficulty in reading electronic reservation disp display. Not easy with current fleet but HST fleet will have a new system.

- Encouraging train changes at Wolverhampton rather than Birmingham will be reviewed.

## 12. Date of Next Conference

Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> June 2020, Liverpool.

### Attendance

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
<i>John</i>	<i>Aaron</i>
<i>Stephen</i>	<i>Abbott</i>
<i>Norman</i>	<i>Adams</i>
<i>David</i>	<i>Alder</i>
<i>Mark</i>	<i>Angelucci</i>
<i>Mike</i>	<i>Ashton</i>
<i>Terri</i>	<i>Balon</i>
<i>Simon</i>	<i>Barber</i>
<i>Mark</i>	<i>Barker</i>
<i>Roger</i>	<i>Barton</i>
<i>Robin</i>	<i>Bence</i>
<i>Nigel</i>	<i>Bird</i>
<i>Paul</i>	<i>Brown</i>
<i>David</i>	<i>Burton</i>
<i>David</i>	<i>Butterworth</i>
<i>Neil</i>	<i>Caldwell</i>
<i>Roy</i>	<i>Chapman</i>
<i>Steve</i>	<i>Clapham</i>
<i>Gordon</i>	<i>Clark</i>
<i>Winnie</i>	<i>Clark</i>
<i>Stephen</i>	<i>Clarke</i>
<i>Ian</i>	<i>Conway</i>
<i>Malcolm</i>	<i>Conway</i>
<i>Geoff</i>	<i>Cook</i>
<i>Alec</i>	<i>Crouch</i>
<i>David</i>	<i>Culshaw</i>
<i>Chris</i>	<i>Dale</i>
<i>Jim</i>	<i>Davies</i>
<i>Kerstin</i>	<i>Esbjornsson</i>

David	Evans	Blackpool & Fylde Rail Users Association
Robert	Florence	North Cheshire Rail Users Group
Stephen	Forde	South Manchester Community Rail Partnerships
Luke	Gardner	TransPennine Express
Paul	Grant	Lancaster & Morecambe Rail Users Group
Cedric	Green	North Cheshire Rail Users Group
Brian	Grey	Wirral Transport Users Association
Chris	Hanks	Grand Central Rail
Dennis	Harrison	Wirral Transport Users Association
Philip	Harrison	
John	Hart	TravelWatch NorthWest
Alan	Jackson	High Peak & Hope Valley CRP
Chris	Jackson	Northern Rail
Roger	Jones	Transport for Greater Manchester Committee
David	Jones	CrossCountry Trains
Colin	Kennington	TravelWatch NorthWest
Fred	Kennington	
Peter	Lamkin	Wrexham- Bidston Rail Users Association
Roger	Lasance	Friends of Heaton Chapel
Mike	Laycock	Wirral Transport Users Association
Frederick	Leach	
Paul	Legon	Lancaster Bus Users Group
John	Lobb	
Richard	Lysons	Friends of Littleborough station
Michael	Machin	Lancaster & Morecambe Rail Users Group
Lucja	Majewski	TransPennine Express
Stuart	Martin	
Alan	Mayor	Settle - Carlisle Railway
Margaret	Mitchell	
Matthew	Moll	The TAS Partnership
John	Moorhouse	TravelWatch NorthWest
Richard	Morris	Friends of the Settle-Carlisle
Jason	Nash	Avanti West Coast
Keith	Naylor	Friends of Patricroft station
Laura	Normansell	Avanti West Coast
Christopher	Norton	Railfuture North West
John	Oates	Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association
John	Owen	TravelWatch NorthWest
Robert	Parker	Furness Line Action Group
Phil	Pearson	
Tony	Potts	
Malcolm	Richardson	Blackpool & Fylde Rail Users Association

<i>John</i>	<i>Ryan</i>	<i>Wirral Transport Users Association</i>
<i>Wayne</i>	<i>Smith</i>	<i>Blackpool Transport</i>
<i>Vernon</i>	<i>Smith</i>	<i>Blackpool &amp; Fylde Rail Users Association</i>
<i>Ken</i>	<i>Swallow</i>	<i>Chartered Institute of Logistics &amp; Transport (NW)</i>
<i>Adrian</i>	<i>Swift</i>	<i>Merseyside Civic Society</i>
<i>Robert</i>	<i>Talbot</i>	<i>TravelWatch NorthWest</i>
<i>David</i>	<i>Thrower</i>	
<i>Jim</i>	<i>Trotman</i>	<i>Lakes Line Community Rail Partnership</i>
<i>Jeremy</i>	<i>Walker</i>	<i>Blackpool Council</i>
<i>Stephen</i>	<i>Waring</i>	<i>Self/Halifax &amp; District Rail Action Group</i>
<i>Ian</i>	<i>Watson</i>	
<i>Cllr David</i>	<i>Whitaker</i>	<i>The Mayor, Lancaster City Council</i>
<i>David</i>	<i>Wood</i>	<i>TravelWatch Midlands West</i>
<i>Craig</i>	<i>Wright</i>	<i>SE Manchester Community Rail Partnership</i>
<i>Tim</i>	<i>Young</i>	<i>TravelWatch NorthWest</i>
<i>Tony</i>	<i>Young</i>	<i>TravelWatch NorthWest</i>