

Winner of CILT award for best practice in passenger transport

promoting quality public transport.....

CONFERENCE REPORT

**Thursday 13th February 2014
 Winmarleigh House, Warrington**

Conference kindly supported by Passenger Focus

1. Welcome and Introduction

The Chairman, Chris Dale, welcomed delegates to Warrington and thanked Passenger Focus for its generous support to the event.

He mentioned the recently published survey on Northern Trains services and noted that a major issue to come out of it was revenue collection which still appeared to be a challenge. He thanked David Butterworth who put the analysis and the final report together and those members who had participated. He also mentioned the forthcoming report on Bus Fare information to be published towards the end of March.

He drew attention to current issues that are exercising TWNW, in particular the proposals to cut subsidy to buses in Cumbria and Lancashire, to which TWNW had objected.. Thankfully Lancashire County Council had eased its proposals.

TWNW had participated in a number of conferences and meetings as follows:

- West Coast Rail 250 HS2 debate
- Passenger Voices on Bus Services - Passenger Focus
- Metrolink through ticketing - TfGM
- First TransPennine Express 350 Launch
- Cumbria Better Connected Conference – Barrow in Furness
- Centre for Cities London Conference
- Northern Trains Management
- Network Rail re. Disruption planning

He then referred to a number of consultations responded to.

(see <http://www.travelwatch-northwest.org.uk/>)

2. Welcome to Warrington

Cllr. Linda Dirir, Executive Board Member for Highways, Transportation & Climate Change, Warrington Borough Council

Cllr Dirir Welcomed delegates to Warrington and expressed her delight that TWNW had chosen to hold its conference here for the first time. She said that she was passionate about public transport and the Council took its responsibilities for it very seriously as the whole transport system in the Borough had changed with new developments and the surrounding motorways. She has a particular interest in the rail route through Warrington Central and hoped that it would be electrified in due course.

3. Integrated Public Transport and Social Responsibilities of Local Government *Alyn Jones, Specialist Transport Services Manager, Warrington B.C.*

Warrington has a growing population currently standing at 203,700 and covers an area of 70 square miles. It has 2 railway stations served by Virgin, Northern Trains, First TransPennine Express and Arriva Trains Wales. It also sits at the apex of 3 motorways (M6, M62 and M56) and is bordered by the River Mersey and the Manchester Ship Canal spanned by 2 swing-bridges. Traffic management can be very challenging as gridlock often occurs when there are motorway problems.

The Omega development at Burtonwood to the west of Warrington is a major developing employment and retail site on both sides of the M62 with major retail outlets, manufacturing, logistics, and distribution companies as well as office developments and 1100 new homes. Whilst most of the access is car borne it is presenting a public transport challenge that will need to be addressed.

Alyn commenced by defining the transport role of the local authority which is to support the provision of sustainable transport by:

- Effective infra-structure
- Regulated publicity and information standards
- Tendered services for social need where there is insufficient patronage
- Sustainable access of new developments

The reasons for funding range through:

- Political expectations
- Economic development – Investment/business placement
- Sociological – Mobility/Independence
- Technological – Research, development & innovation
- Legal – response to Transport Act 1985
- Environmental – Green travel
- Ethics/demographics – Equality in access
- Congestion management

Warrington Borough Council operates its own bus services and until 2010/11 it had seen an increase of 11% in patronage. However patronage in the period from 2011 – 2014 had declined by 15%. There appeared to be a number of reasons for this mainly driven by reductions in funding due to budget cuts. This had led to reduced frequencies, dis-

connected routes, reduced access to employment areas, reduction of students eligible for free transport,

This experience has led the Council to re-assess its priorities in transport provision to Education/Training, Employment/Business, Access to Healthcare, Social, Domestic and Pleasure. The approach will be to review funding options, take early intervention and explore partnerships between public sector organisations. Demand responsive solutions will be considered, such as hospital and health appointment transport, and employment site supported solutions. Routes with demonstrated need will be supported but work with operators toward commerciality will continue.

For the future, ongoing dialogue and engagement with operators, planners and developers at the earliest stages will be vital to flag up access issues and continual monitoring and review will be necessary to meet changing demands. If the current situation is ignored and the downward trend in bus patronage is allowed to continue it will lead to unsustainable travel, increase in road accidents and casualties, employer emigration, reduction in health levels and ultimately, continual gridlock.

In open discussion points were raised about fare differentials between operators, poor marketing and front line staff research. All these issues were on the agenda but funding challenges were at the root of the problem. Reference was also made to a new rail station at Warrington West which was receiving consideration.

4. Prospects for Community Transport

Bill Freeman, Chief Executive, Community Transport Association

Bill introduced the Community Transport Association as a national membership body with 1600 members (10% in the North West), which includes charities, voluntary groups, local authorities and supply companies. They provide transport to access to education, employment, healthcare and other social services. It provides leadership by providing profile and response to government policies and consultations etc. and advice, support and hands-on training to its members. Social values are paramount and it is not a profit sharing organisation.

The Association's priorities are towards the limited mobility, vulnerable and isolated sectors where conventional transport services do not meet their needs. Its members have a high level of volunteer involvement at all levels in providing group transport, car schemes, door to door transport, community buses, "wheels to work" projects and shopmobility. The 2000 participating operators carry 15 million passenger journeys per year, and the membership has 11,500 paid staff and 60,000 volunteers.

Rising demand against reducing income is a future challenge. The current funding model is under pressure and unrealistic expectations exist that Community Transport can replace conventional services as a last resort or cheap alternative is putting current operators under some difficulty. There is need for a more entrepreneurial approach and some joint commissioning with input from other sectors like health and employment organisations.

Better data and evidence illustrating the value of the service as well as the impacts of funding challenges need to be assembled to meet current market demand. Collaboration between CT operators and other transport providers will help with streamlining the service

and connectivity. There is a strong leadership role required from local authorities and intelligence from best practice examples in the UK and Europe can provide helpful models.

Solutions for the future need to address the negative impact of current licencing and the inability to be part of the public transport concession scheme. Additionally better involvement of destination managements in supporting CT is required as it is currently patchy. Government intervention would be helpful.

In discussion the image of Community Transport, perceived as a service for the elderly and disabled, and its lack of availability for visitors and for casual users were highlighted. Current membership rules conspire against out of community use and, as it can be an issue for cross border journeys it needs to be considered. This type of inclusivity will help to present a better image. A pilot scheme currently under way in Northern Ireland may bring some good recommendations.

5. “Just a Minute”

Public Transport Issues from delegates

The “Just a Minute” session allows delegates to make points about public transport issues in a short 1 minute statement. Issues raised in the session were:

- Electrification of routes through Warrington Central
- Fares evasion on Northern Trains
- TOWN support for Metrolink 2nd city crossing
- Voice for bus passengers in proposed cuts
- Potential for Metrolink extension to Bolton
- Furness line changes and implications for West Cumbria
- Warrington bus fares
- Connectivity to/from Ormskirk – Preston line at both ends
- Halton curve – ongoing impetus
- Rail North/DfT partnership and implications for TOWN

6. First TransPennine Express – building on success

Nick Donovan, Managing Director, First TransPennine Express

Since the commencement of the First TransPennine Express franchise in 2003 passenger numbers on its routes had doubled and satisfaction levels had increased to an average of 85%. 70% of passengers travel for leisure purposes. Blackpool traffic had increased by 7%, Cleethorpes by 14% and Windermere by 25%. It has also driven down the fare subsidy levels from the taxpayer from 120% to 25%.

The company has 355 staff and sets a high priority on training. It has recently opened a new training facility in Huddersfield. It has embarked on an “eco-challenge” to reduce carbon emissions using new technologies and training in new driver techniques.

Nick admitted that the company, along with the rest of the train operating companies, had still work to do on information provision, particularly at times of disruption and there was room for improvement. The recent bad weather experience had provided severe

North West Public Transport Users’ Forum Community Interest Company trading as TravelWatch NorthWest

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challenges and the response was not as good as it should have been and lessons were still being learned.

FTPE is moving strongly into better use of technology in relation to ticketing and is now providing mobile device ticketing using QR codes and “print at home” tickets.

FTPE takes community responsibilities very seriously and is active in many charitable projects and support to the “World of Work” encouraging projects to provide opportunities for young people to get into career employment. It also values the work of volunteer organisations like Rail User Groups and Community Rail Partnerships highly and uses the various pieces of vital surveying work they carry out for future planning. They also value the feedback provided by organisations like TWNW.

Stations had seen £21 million of investment and recent achievements have been a new car parking accommodation for 120 cars at Northallerton and the installation of lifts at Stalybridge and Birchwood. Added to this is the partnership building the 4th platform at Manchester Airport. Improved security had seen a reduction of 25% in crime at stations and the company is sponsoring 2 police support officers.

FTPE is now the busiest train operator on the UK network and this leads to it being the most overcrowded. From May 2014 the capacity of its fleet will increase by 30% with the arrival of the 10 new Class 350 electric trains for the Scottish routes. The new trains will be 4 coach units providing extra seating and more toilets. The new timetable that will commence in May will double the departures from Liverpool and shave 30 minutes off the Newcastle services as well as looking to provide 6 trains per hour on the Manchester - Leeds corridor.

For the future FTPE was working constructively with partners and stakeholders to look to achieve electrification of the Windermere line and a better timetable, with possible electrification, on the Furness line.

The company is already preparing for the new franchise which will commence in 2015 and, whether or not it is successful in being appointed to run it, it is committed to a seamless transition for the future. It supports the rail North/DfT partnership and favours the 2 franchise model for the North of England.

In discussion reference was made to trains not having electronic reservation displays and WiFi. It is felt that the current systems used by other train companies are unreliable but WiFi remains an aspiration for the future. The changes to the Scarborough – Liverpool services via Warrington were driven by DfT decisions and need to be campaigned for in the new franchise consultation.

7. Passengers First

David Beer, Passenger Executive, Passenger Focus

David began by describing the Rail Passenger Survey results for 2012-13 which had received 55,000 responses from passengers. The main issues that emerged were:

- Ticket buying facilities at unmanned remote stations requires addressing

- Connectivity with other transport modes
- Better safety and security at stations – NW better than UK average
- Availability of staff customer interface had improved
- Drops in connections & frequency/punctuality
- Northern Trains scoring poorly in train upkeep/repair
- Delays – response to passengers improving but still scores low

Research suggests that passengers feel that fares offer value for money. “Ticket to Ride” guidelines have been issued to train operators to advise on best course of action in ticket enforcement and ensure all avenues have been explored before resorting to penalties. Smart ticketing is becoming more popular but it must offer convenience, simplicity, security and be tailored to meet the needs of the passenger.

A major issue is the response to dealing with consequences of delays. There are mixed experiences between operators and quicker momentum towards improving standards are required. Equally disruption planning needs clearer information with more available in advance, better passenger treatment and better recompense regimes from affected passengers. Some discounted ticket schemes offered by certain train companies were commended.

For the future more opportunities for passengers to be consulted well in advance of changes is paramount and the franchise review would be expected to feature a more open approach. Passenger Focus will be holding a series of passenger group workshops and a North West event will be held in Manchester in April.

In the bus sector a major passenger survey will be published by early April and a report on a survey of tram passengers will be published in late March.

In discussion the work of volunteers in information and intelligence was raised and it was acknowledged that this was very important work. Interior train design was often funding driven and PF had limited influence but is happy to provide advice and recommendations.

8. Information is Paramount

Graham Richards, Deputy Director, Rail Planning & Performance, ORR

The Office of Rail Regulation recognises that regulation is always secondary to delivery and attempts to be flexible in its work. It is pleased that UK railways have an excellent safety record – 2nd in Europe.

The ORR is carefully monitoring Network Rail costs and influencing reductions in them and also is responsible for the approval of agreements between NR and train companies. It also regulates licence conditions for information provision and through these demands effective and accurate timetabling presentation. It expects operators to comply with Codes of Practice although it recognises the need for flexibility against the background of prevailing conditions.

On the whole the ORR is content with the standards of information provision but has concerns about progress which, at best, is slow. It has commissioned Passenger Focus to carry out research and is asking the industry to explain. Funding is available from various sources for improved technology.

In discussion reference was made to the reluctance of Network Rail to publish its long term engineering and possession plans which involve blockades, particularly on the West Coast Main line. ORR is happy to receive information and concerns about performance issues to inform its quest for improvements in information provision.

9. Next Conference

Thursday 5th June at the offices of TfGM, Manchester

Attendance

Name	Organisation
Adam Patterson	Transport for Greater Manchester
Aidan Turner-Bishop	Campaign for Better Transport Lancashire
Alan Wilson	Kendal & District Bus Users
Allan Brown	
Alyn Jones	Warrington Borough Council
Anne Brown	
Barry Dobson	Arriva Merseyside
Bill Freeman	Community Transport Association
Bill Lear	Derbyshire County Council PTU
Bob Barlow	Agito Transport Planning
Bob Florence	North Cheshire Rail Users Group
Brian Roberts	Ormskirk Preston Southport Travellers Assoc.
Cedric Green	North Cheshire Rail Users Group
Chris Dale	TWNW
Chris Holmes	TWNW
Chris Jarvis	Institute of Transport Administration
Cllr Linda Dirir	Warrington Borough Council
Colin Barnett	Bus Users UK
Craig White	Transport for Greater Manchester
Dave Koring	Severn-Dee Travel
David Armstrong	
David Beer	Passenger Focus
David Culshaw	Friends of Hindley station
David Evans	Blackpool & Fylde Rail Users Association
David Thrower	
Dennis Harrison	Wirral Transport Users Association
Dick Clague	TravelWatch Isle of Man
Don Jary	Northern Rail
Geoff Kerr	
Graham Richards	Office of Rail Regulation
Harry Boardman	Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association
Ian McDermott	South Reddish Station Group
Ian Stuart	
James Tune	Liverpool & Sefton Chambers of Commerce
Janet Briggs	North Cheshire Rail Users Group
Jeff Briggs	Halton Borough Council

Jim Froggatt	TravelWatch East Midlands
John Moorhouse	TWNW
John Aaron	
John Berry	Ormskirk Preston Southport Travellers Assoc.
John Culshaw	Mattersons Cranes
John Hart	TWNW
John Hobbs	North Cheshire Rail Users Group
John McCoroskin	Warrington Borough Council
John Owen	TWNW
John Ryan	Wirral Transport Users Association
Kath Roberts	Ormskirk Preston Southport Travellers Assoc.
Kathryn O'Brien	First TransPennine Express
Katie Pantelli	Passenger Focus
Keith Pennyfather	
Ken McKelvie	Ramblers Association
Ken Swallow	CILT North West
Malcolm Richardson	Blackpool & Fylde RUA
Margaret Mitchell	
Nick Donovan	First TransPennine Express
Paul Fawcett	TWNW
Peter Lamkin	Wrexham Birkenhead Rail Users Association
Phil Halewood	Merseytravel
Philip Briggs	North Cheshire Rail Users Group
Preva Crossley	Friends of Hindley station
Richard Lysons	Friends of Littleborough Station
Richard Rollins	TWNW
Roy Chapman	Transport for Greater Manchester
Russell Warhurst	University of Chester
Tony Potts	Copeland RUG
Trevor Bishop	Railfuture North West England