

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

promoting quality public transport.....

CONFERENCE REPORT

Thursday 8th June 2017

Merseytravel, Mann Island, Liverpool

Conference kindly supported by Merseytravel & Virgin Trains

1. Welcome and Introduction

The Chairman, Chris Dale, welcomed delegates to Liverpool and thanked the sponsors.

He began the meeting by informing delegates of the recent death of Paul Fawcett. Paul had been a member of TOWN since the start of the organisation and had been an active member of the Board and Management Group, contributing a great deal in compiling detailed responses to many of the consultations received and also bringing a wise academic counsel to debates. Delegates stood in silent respectful tribute for a brief time

Chris also paid tribute to the British Transport Police and railway industry staff who provided great assistance during the recent tragedies in Manchester and London.

He went on to refer to the ongoing engineering work in the region and the constant challenge this brings to the leisure markets of tourism areas like the Lake District. Representations to improve alternative transport arrangements are constantly being pursued as are the arguments to persuade the rail industry to utilise potential diversionary routes such as the Settle – Carlisle line. However, frustratingly, the case continues to fall on “deaf ears.”

The industrial action over DCO has caused misery to passengers with no solution in sight. TOWN has taken a neutral stance on the issue but believes that a 2nd staff member should be present on trains to provide security, assistance to less abled, dealing with emergencies and general customer service.

Finally he mentioned that the liaison and advocacy work of TOWN continued and that 19 meetings with rail, bus, local authorities and other transport agencies had been attended and a number of consultation responses had been compiled and submitted since March 2017.

2. Merseytravel

Shane Fitzpatrick, Head of Operations

Merseytravel serves a population of 1.5 million and a further 0.9 million in outreach areas. 50% of journeys are less than 5 km. It provides advice to the newly established Mayor's office and is the accountable body to the Merseyside Transport Authority. Merseytravel has devolved responsibility over a multi-year transport budget with a single investment fund for the key road network management, franchised bus services, train rolling stock procurement and stations. Under its budget it seeks ongoing value for money reviews and revenue yield.

It is responsible for the 25-year franchise of Merseyrail ending in 2028, the bus key route network, encouragement of walking and cycling, and the operation of the two Mersey tunnels. It operates to a series of long term strategies for each of these segments with an overall 30-year Growth Plan launched in 2015 to address delivery, collaborative working patterns, regeneration, carbon reduction, connectivity and access to training, education and employment. Work is also ongoing with the Northern Powerhouse agencies to provide a counterbalance with the South East and to provide better connectivity throughout the North, with major emphasis on West – East train services. The provision of a hub for HS2 in Liverpool is also being vigorously pursued.

The long term 30-year **Rail Strategy** commenced in 2014 and is under 3-year periodical reviews. It will dovetail into the £340 million investment in the City Region and include the major upgrade to Lime Street station. Its main components are:

- City Centre improvement with emphasis on Liverpool Central
- Park & Ride at Maghull and Newton le Willows
- Wapping Tunnel
- New fleet of rolling stock with potential battery capability
- Faster journeys with more capacity
- Step free access for less abled

Freight is a major market for the region and following the £400 million investment in the deep-water terminal the port capacity has been increased threefold. This investment provides a competitive position with Southampton to attract imports from SE Asia destined for the North but surrounding infra-structure for ongoing multi-modal transport access needs improving.

The new **Mersey Gateway Bridge** opens in September and will feature 6 toll booths and provide much relief to the present crossing. The **Tunnels** have 25 million vehicle movements per year and are now utilising technology for speedier toll gate operations. Road safety is being brought together by the 6 local authorities.

The **Ferries** strategy will provide £27 million investment over 20 years and seeks to optimise tourism business, consider replacement vessels, and improve landing stages.

A **Bus Alliance** has been formed to help grow fare revenue and improve the bus offer. Its main output to date is the under 19's £2 flat fare.

Subsequent discussion featured:

- HS2/HS3 linkages – being considered by Transport for the North
- Single management of stations providing better procurement options
- Bus priority lanes – under review as part of key network strategy
- Spatial planning & land use – Mayoral team investigating transport hubs
- Freight access to rail network – TfN leading cross regional capability study
- Driverless vehicles – trialling and seeking funds to pursue

3. Merseyrail's New Trains

Rob Monnier, New Trains Programme

The new train programme is being developed with an overall cost of £460 million. It will feature a distinctive fleet of trains to enter service by 2021 and replace the 40-year-old units currently providing the service that are now becoming obsolete and difficult to maintain.

52 new 4 coach, 487 seat units are being ordered and will be owned outright by Merseytravel rather than being leased from a rolling stock company as at present. Their reliability is expected to increase 4-fold and in providing passenger growth of 2.5% per year will bring an economic benefit valued at £70 million per annum and 1000 new jobs. They will provide a 10% journey time improvement and a 60% increase in capacity as well as a reduced carbon footprint. The trains will be air conditioned, have CCTV, better provision for cycles and prams and WiFi provision is being considered as a future development.

Whilst the trains will be dedicated to the 3rd rail operation of the Merseyrail network they will have a pantograph fitted and battery operation capability to cater for future operation to certain destinations off the network, such as Preston and Wigan. They will be maintained at a new depot at Kirkdale.

Station interfaces will be improved by the feature of a sliding step to enable automatic ramp access and automated warnings. Improved door sensors and CCTV monitors will also enable faster loading.

Subsequent discussion featured:

- New and old trains will be compatible for coupling together
- Selective door opening capability to compensate for short platform issues
- 3rd rail link to Preston/Wigan an issue for ORR. Skelmersdale link considered
- Toilet provision for longer journeys. Will be reviewed in line with development

4. "Just a Minute"

Discussion items covered in the "Just a Minute session were as follows:

Future of Dales Rail summer Sunday service on Settle and Carlisle line – No plans for any curtailment of future services.

School Bus company identification labelling – desirable where possible but dependent on local authority contracts with operators.

Withdrawal of Bus service 200 from Manchester Airport to airside viewing platform – will be replaced in near future.

Rolling poster displays on stations need slowing down to enable reading of timetables and train information before displaying advertising.

Train direction formation information at stations prior to arrival – still an issue but improving.

Bus operators views on franchising through Mayor's offices – not popular with bus operators who will seek alternative solutions.

Bus services from east Cheshire to Manchester Airport under threat due to funding shortfalls.

5. Stagecoach Merseyside, South Lancs. Chester & Wirral

Alex Crane, Operations Director

The Stagecoach group has 17 operating companies plus its London operations. It has 34,000 employees (23,000 in UK) and operates 12,500 vehicles in the UK and North America (8100 UK). It is also active in 25% of the UK rail network franchises and operates Sheffield Super Tram. In the UK it transports 662 million passengers per year (excluding London) and travels a total of 319 million miles.

In Merseyside and South Lancashire it employs 1200 people, carries 45.1 million passengers per year and operates 361 vehicles covering 17.7 million miles. It has depots at Birkenhead, Chester, Liverpool, and Preston. New vehicles are being operated on the X2 Preston - Southport – Liverpool service and more of the total fleet are now WiFi equipped.

In 2016 Stagecoach became a member of the Liverpool City Region Bus Alliance and also embarked on a series of improvement measures viz:

- £11 million investment in vehicle and service quality
- Ensuring the bus offer provided value for money
- A straightforward fare structure
- Better journey planning and network
- Promoting bus travel through a substantial marketing budget

Taking its environmental care seriously it has invested in renewable fuel capability, reduced energy consumption at depots, harnessing solar power, cutting water use and recycling more waste product. Its Euro 6 vehicle fleet emits 15 - 30% less gasses and provides a 17% fuel saving.

Digital technology is being utilised to provide website enhancement, smartphone apps, smart & mobile ticketing, contactless payment, multi operator ticketing and point to point fares.

Continuing challenges are poor road maintenance, traffic congestion and future franchising which it sees a detriment to both passengers and operators.

Subsequent discussion featured:

- On Board information utilising GPS – an aspiration but challenging “back office” software issues.
- Real time information displays – Working with Merseytravel & invested in mobile app.
- Bus Lanes & Priorities – Some bus lanes were obsolete and need review. Some bus signalling priority introduced at major junction traffic lights.
- Understandable destination displays – geared to local use and use of scrolling screens but difficult to please everyone
- Bus Alliance membership – open to all operators but financial commitment difficult for smaller companies.
- Franchising opportunities – against what is seen as re-regulation of bus industry as it returns the financial burden to the public sector.
- Reluctance to use bus stations? – not true but local authorities must be mindful of exorbitance in price regime and remember that commercial decisions need to be made.

5. Virgin Trains West Coast

Michael Stewart, General Manager, Anglo Scot route

In 2017 Virgin Trains is celebrating its 20th anniversary of train operation on the West Coast Mainline. The company currently operates 76 trains per day, serves 49 destinations, covers 334.5 million miles per year, provides 37 million journeys per year and employs 3556 people. Virgin aspires to achieve 50 million journeys per year and is customer led using a passenger advocacy system. Last year it recorded an overall average of 80% on time arrivals

Recent developments have seen direct trains re-introduced to Blackpool and Shrewsbury to add to the high frequency timetable currently operated. M-tickets, auto delay-repay, a pre-boarding system at Euston and the BEAM on board entertainment and information system are all new innovations.

At stations enhanced retail areas, free WiFi and better ticket vending machines are all being developed. At Preston a re-designed ticket hall, cycle hub and new side entrance have all launched recently. A door to door journey planning tool is being developed for the website recognising that journeys do not begin and end at the railway station.

Virgin works in partnership with enterprise, economic and marketing agencies and also Community Rail Partnerships. It views stations as local hubs and encourages SME's to become involved by promoting “pop up” retail events. It supports its charity partner – Re-think Mental Illness. As part of its ongoing recruitment policy it runs apprenticeship programmes and ex-offender opportunities.

In September a 10-week blockade of Lime Street will be in operation and Virgin is working with partners to minimise disruption during this period. It is open to any feedback and ideas from all stakeholders. Trains will begin and end their journeys at Liverpool South Parkway as it serves as a best option for integration and connections.

The next WCML franchise will commence in April 2019 and the successful bidder will be announced in November 2018.

Subsequent discussion featured:

- HS2 Euston development work – In negotiation to find most acceptable solution.
- Liverpool – Glasgow service – Virgin would welcome chance to operate but DfT offered it to Trans-Pennine. Views welcome in the franchise consultation.
- Blackpool service enhancement? - Only 1 path per day offered.
- TPE introducing earlier Sunday southbound departures on WCML through Cumbria. Any chance Virgin may follow? – Not planned but open to views in franchise consultation.
- Revenue collection – Acknowledges need to improve.
- Improving baggage space – Challenging and current project in progress to examine solutions.
- Preston platform 5/6 usage – Acknowledges shortcomings and examining better solution.
- In journey seat reservation – Not being implemented on WCML.
- Threat to ticket sales from independent suppliers by competition of on-line only offers – Considering implications but will look at issues.
- Advance fare train capacity – Currently managed by yield management process but open to examine examples of more availability.
- Later services to Liverpool from Euston – Will consider as part of next franchise consultation.

7. Next Conference

Thursday 12th October 2017, Salford

Attendance

Name	Organisation
Adrian Swift	
Aidan Turner Bishop	Lancashire Campaign for Better Transport
Alex Crane	Stagecoach Merseyside, S. Lancs, Chester & Wirral
Andy Saunders	Manchester Airport
Brian Grey	Wirral Transport Users Association
Caroline Whittam	Transport for Greater Manchester
Cedric Green	North Cheshire Rail Users Group
Chris Dale	TravelWatch NorthWest
Chris Holmes	CILT
Christopher Norton	Ralfuture North West
Colin Barnett	
Dave Koring	Severn-Dee Travel Ltd at Gobowen Station
David Armstrong	
David Burton	SELRAP
David Culshaw	Friends of Hindley station

David Evans	Blackpool & Fylde RUA
David Godsmark	
David Thrower	
Dennis Harrison	Wirral Transport Users Association
Ian Allsopp	Wirral Transport Users Association
Fred Consterdine	
John Aaron	
John Berry	Ormskirk Preston Southport Travellers Association
John Lobb	
John Moorhouse	TravelWatch NorthWest
John Owen	TravelWatch NorthWest
John Ryan	Wirral Transport Users Association
Keith Pennyfather	
Ken Swallow	Chartered Institute of Logistics & Transport (NW)
Laura Normansell	Virgin Trains
Lucja Majewski	TransPennine Express
Malcolm Conway	TravelWatch NorthWest
Malcolm Richardson	Blackpool & Fylde RUA
Margaret Mitchell	
Matthew Cranwell	Stagecoach Cumbria & North Lancs
Michael Stewart	Virgin West Coast
Mike Breslin	Railfuture North West
Mike Laycock	Wirral Transport Users Association
Mike Owen	
Mike Machin	Lancaster & Morecambe RUG
Neil Caldwell	Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport
Norman Adams	
Paul Grant	Lancaster, Morecambe & District Rail Users Group
Peter Lamkin	Wrexham- Bidston Rail Users Association
Phil Saunders	Merseytravel
Phil Smith	ROSSO Bus
Philip Briggs	North Cheshire Rail Users Group
Rob Monnier	Merseytravel
Robert Florence	North Cheshire Rail Users Group
Robert Talbot	TravelWatch NorthWest
Roy Chapman	Salford City Council
Shane Fitzpatrick	Merseytravel
Stephen Forde	Manchester Community Rail Partnerships
Tim Young	Campaign for Better Transport Lancs
Vicki Sefton	
Vicky Cropper	Arriva Rail North