

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

promoting quality public transport.....

CONFERENCE REPORT

**Thursday 14th June 2018
 The Solaris Centre, Blackpool**

**Conference kindly supported by Blackpool Transport Services
 and Blackpool Council**

1. Welcome and Introduction

The Chairman, Chris Dale, welcomed delegates to Blackpool and thanked Blackpool Transport Services and Blackpool Council for their generous support to the Conference.

He introduced the Passenger Survey of Bus Services in NW England that TWNW was launching at the Conference. During early Spring 218 bus journeys across the region covering various operators were sampled. The results indicated that whilst some improvements in vehicle quality have occurred in some areas, others still run aged fleets of vehicles that require upgrading. Also there is still much work to do to make it easier for travellers to obtain information and have confidence in using services in unfamiliar areas.

The current state of Northern Rail service failures has been alarming, even before the new timetable was imposed on the system with many cancellations and poor performance, leading to some areas experiencing total shut down of branch lines. TWNW wrote to Transport for the North expressing its concern about the situation and it was shortly after this that the issue became national news with many political leaders becoming involved. The debacle is ongoing but with the issue now securely in the public domain it is hoped that solutions will be found in the near future.

TWNW has also been petitioning for the use of the Settle to Carlisle route being used during periods of engineering work on the WCML citing the documented desire of passengers to stay on trains, rather than endure long replacement bus journeys with their consequent disruption to passenger comfort. However the campaign has fallen on deaf ears so far with Rail Minister Jo Johnson MP openly siding with the train operators rather than the passengers. TWNW will, however continue pressure on this matter.

He then referred to the decision by Lancs. County Council's to close information centres throughout the County including ticket offices at Carnforth and Clitheroe.

TWNW had responded to the consultation on the matter emphasising their value to communities and the minimal operational cost.

Finally he mentioned the meetings that he and colleagues had attended on behalf of TWNW since the last Conference which numbered 23 covering all aspects of transport issues in the North West.

2. Buses and Trams in Blackpool

Jane Cole, Managing Director, Blackpool Transport Services Ltd.

Jane began by welcoming delegates to Blackpool in the absence of the Blackpool Council's Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Highways, Cllr Fred Jackson who was unable to attend due to ill health.

She had now been in her job for 3½ years and during that time had faced many challenges and changes. Road improvements, rail electrification and the tramway extension to North Station had all been completed or commenced during her tenure and each brought its individual challenge. However she was grateful for the support of the Council and the business community in finding solutions to temporary disruption.

She referred to the transformation of her Board of Directors that had brought commercial representatives to the membership and a new approach that had allowed dynamic progress in the Company to take a more entrepreneurial strategy forward with the involvement of the business community.

Blackpool Transport now has 130 buses, 94 of which are the new Palladium brand, that run over 15 routes and by 2020 will have invested £23million into the fleet. The Tramway currently has 11 miles of track and operates 18 new trams running to a published timetable, and a further 15 – 20 operational vehicles in the Heritage fleet. The North station extension is currently under construction and will be completed in late 2019/early 2020.

The engineering workforce has been re-skilled to allow more flexibility and resultant job satisfaction and a 13 strong Customer Focus team has been established to deal with passenger issues with a robust complaint service. Staff training has been revolutionised to cover passenger needs, disability awareness, mental health awareness, dementia awareness and Guide Dogs UK have been enlisted to provide advice on sight issues. An employee well being programme has been introduced which includes support for drivers who have to face anti social behaviour and occasional violence.

Blackpool Transport was pleased to be contracted to provide the rail replacement bus service between Blackpool and Preston during the period of the rail line closures for electrification. 20 buses were provided to operate a high quality service resulting in 95% satisfaction from passengers. The service will be scaled back from 24th June and end on 29th July when it is expected that full train operation will return.

Recent innovations are the recently launched Blackpool Transport app, featuring timetables, fares and routes, which has had 61,000 downloads with 19,000 visits per month so far, ticket availability from hotels and a new sales pod at North station.

In subsequent discussion reference was made to:

- Advantages of being a locally owned company
- Community engagement leading to route adaptation to meet needs as well as new residential and industrial development
- Social inclusion,
- Partnership working to address anti social behaviour
- Future investment including tramway extensions into Lytham
- Engagement with investment bodies including the LEP
- Sharing best practice on a global scale

3. Network Rail's challenges and modernisation in the North West Patrick Cawley, Director of Route Sponsorship, LNW Route

Patrick began by referring to the current engineering programmes across the rail network that, by 2022, will result in 2000 extra train services per day providing for an extra 40,000 passengers per day with the introduction of 500 new train coaches.

In the North West the Ordsall Chord had been completed on time and on budget in late 2017 at a cost of £300 million and had reconnected Manchester stations for the 1st time in over a century allowing better service flexibility. The Preston to Blackpool route electrification had required the installation of 1000 steel structures, 200,000 metres of overhead line, 11,000 meters of new track, 84 new signals with control from the Manchester ROC, upgraded drainage systems and the remodelling of 11 station platforms. Liverpool Lime Street will suffer further closure for 8 weeks during the summer to enable more capacity with completion of the project by late 2018. A new station is being constructed at Maghull and Halton Curve will become operational in December 2018. Additionally Newton le Willows is under reconstruction with expanded parking to enable more park and ride provision.

The Preston – Bolton – Manchester route upgrade had brought significant challenges with unexpected ground conditions and the collapse of the major contractor, Carillion. However it was now expected to be completed in time for the December 2018 timetable. The Manchester Victoria – Salford route will suffer a 15 day closure for resignalling and the DfT announcement for the Trans Pennine route is expected in the autumn.

£50 million has been invested in the commissioning of new depots at Wigan Springs Branch, Blackpool North and Blackburn.

In subsequent discussion reference was made to:

- Care of stations and the general railway estate, with Clitheroe as an example - challenging but committed to improvement (*subsequent action resulted in site clearance at Clitheroe*)
- Cumbria Coast line upgrade programme in preparation with various partners

- Platforms 15/16 at Man. Picc. as well as Oxford Road need review and redevelopment and new signalling
- Poulton le Fylde platform length will enable Northern electrics to stop but not Virgin trains
- 2017/18 Timetable roll forward not possible due to political pressure and constraints already in place

4. National Express in the North West

Elaine Williams, Deputy Service Director, National Express UK

National Express has a \$3.2 billion global turnover across 3 continents. In the UK it is pursuing a strategy to change the perception of coach travel offering competitive fares, a good comprehensive service and a customer friendly focus. It currently has 60% of the scheduled coach network and a leisure market share of 2.5%.

The company operates 550 coaches in the UK with all vehicles being less than 4 years old and has an ongoing fleet renewal programme. It employs 1700 people, runs 1500 service per day serving 1000 destinations including 24 hour services direct to the 5 largest airports. 19 million passenger journeys are taken per year and there is a commitment to Accessible travel even though it is acknowledged that coaches can provide challenges less-abled people.

Manchester is served as 1 of 5 national hubs and there is a demand responsive attitude to recognise developing markets as well as operating direct for festivals and events at Wembley.

The company operates a rigid safety policy for drivers with live safety monitoring, pre journey breath testing to detect alcohol, and vehicle lock out in case of any failure. It also has an emissions reduction policy that includes driver behaviour and practices, fuel efficiency and minimal idling.

Punctuality is under constant review with regular liaison with Highways England in respect of roadworks, and the allowance of drivers to vary routeing in case of delays.

In subsequent discussion reference was made to:

- Christmas/Boxing Day service demand increasing, notably to airports
- Business Development team in place to look at commercial opportunities and will look at viability of Blackpool – Glasgow corridor and Lancaster
- Coach Cards selling well
- Plus Bus had been examined but not commercially viable
- Corporate decision not to publish printed timetables

5. Points of View

An opportunity for delegates to raise relevant issues.

The Points of View session provides an opportunity for delegates to raise any matter they wish to on public transport issues in the region. The following matters were raised and debated:

- Future proofing of Network Capacity on Blackpool – Preston route – difficult to predict but Preston station requires major redevelopment
- Train services in West Cumbria operating normally in new timetable
- Electric Railway Charter launched by user groups on Calder Valley line - comments welcome
- Provision for cycles on trains- challenges over capacity issues
- Fares Review – Britain Runs on Rail website consultation

6. Next Conference

Thursday 18th October 2018, Offices of Merseytravel, Liverpool

Attendance

Name	Organisation
Bob Robinson	Ormskirk Preston Southport Travellers Assoc.
Cedric Green	North Cheshire Rail Users Group
Charles Oakes	The Hackney Drivers Association Ltd
Chris Dale	TravelWatch NorthWest
Chris Holmes	Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport
Christopher Norton	Railfuture North West
Colin Barnett	
David Armstrong	
David Beer	Transport Focus
David Butterworth	TravelWatch NorthWest
David Culshaw	Friends of Hindley station
David Evans	Blackpool & Fylde Rail Users Assoc.
David Simper	Blackpool Council
Dennis Harrison	Wirral Transport Users Association
Elaine Williams	National Express
Ian Middlemiss	Blackpool Transport Services Ltd
Jane Cole	Blackpool Transport Services Ltd
Jim Davies	Lancaster Bus Users Group
John Aaron	
John Berry	Ormskirk Preston Southport Travellers Assoc.
John Hart	TravelWatch NorthWest
John Moorhouse	TravelWatch NorthWest

John Owen	TravelWatch NorthWest
John Ryan	Wirral Transport Users Association
Keith Whitmore	
Laura Normansell	Virgin Trains
Lucja Majewski	First TransPennine Express
Malcolm Conway	TravelWatch NorthWest
Malcolm Richardson	Blackpool & Fylde RUA
Mandy Davies	Blackpool Transport Services Ltd
Margaret Mitchell	
Marjorie Ward	Brindle over 55s
Mark Barker	
Mike Laycock	Wirral Transport Users Association
Neil Caldwell	Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport
Norman Adams	
Patrick Cawley	Network Rail
Paul Rowen	Light Rail Transit Association
Peter Lamkin	Wrexham- Bidston Rail Users Association
Phil Pearson	
Richard Lysons	Friends of Littleborough station & STORM
Robert Florence	North Cheshire Rail Users Group
Robert Talbot	TravelWatch NorthWest
Robin Bence	
Stephen Waring	Halifax & District Rail Action Grp/Electric Rly Charter
Tim Young	Campaign for Better Transport Lancs
Tony Potts	The Cumbrian Coast Rail Users Group
Tony Young	TravelWatch NorthWest
Vernon Smith	Blackpool & Fylde Rail Users Association.