

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

***promoting quality public transport.....***

## **CONFERENCE REPORT**

**Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> June 2019 County Hall, Preston**

**Conference kindly supported by Lancashire County Council & Preston Bus**

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

The Chairman, Chris Dale, welcomed delegates to Preston and thanked Lancashire County Council and Preston Bus for their generous support to the Conference.

He began by welcoming the resolution of the recent industrial action by Northern Rail staff and was pleased that an agreement had been reached. He was also optimistic that agreement will be reached with unions over the Sunday working issue. However passengers were still suffering from overcrowding and cancellations due to staff shortages caused by driver training but he hoped the new trains would provide greater capacity and matters will be resolved..

Engineering blockades over recent holiday periods continue to cause concern to tourist destinations and the next blockade of the West Coast Main line at the height of summer was regrettable. Lobbying from TOWNW will continue to try and change thinking about closures at busy holiday times.

He referred to the Rail Survey Report – Spring 2019, that was launched at the Conference. 180 train services were reviewed in April and May and revealed a general improvement in standards, but ticket inspection was still relatively poor, giving concern about fare evasion, and overcrowding at peak times remained a serious issue.

The October Conference, to be held in the Manchester area, was planned to be “The North West Bus debate” to reflect and contribute to the current examination of bus service provision. It is planned to have a range of speakers representing a wide range of stakeholders in the industry.

He mentioned the 22 meetings and events that he and colleagues had attended on behalf of TOWNW since the last Conference, covering all aspects of transport issues in the North West and the responses to recent Consultations on Pay as you Go on Rail (DfT), Light Rail (DfT), Trains for the Future (Transport Select Committee), and the Williams Rail Review.

Finally he informed the Conference that TOWNW's major sponsor had ceased its financial support and urged delegates to contribute to costs to ensure the future of the organisation.

## **2. Meeting Lancashire's Public Transport needs**

### ***County Cllr. Andrew Snowden, Lead Member – Highways and Transport***

Cllr. Snowden welcomed delegates to Preston and gave his appreciation to TOWNW for the work it carries out on behalf of passengers.

He began by referring to the financial difficulties Lancashire County Council had had to face during recent years and the difficult decisions it had to make. A recent consultation had revealed concern over the state of highways, library & museum closures and curtailment of supported bus services. As a result £10 million had been allocated to highway issues, a programme of re-opening of libraries had been activated and an increase of 50% to the budget for bus service support had been agreed.

An examination was ongoing to identify the biggest impact of bus service withdrawals and focussed on lost connections, particularly in rural links to urban centres and economic development sites, and so far over 30 new services have been introduced in the last year. Areas that have received support are Lancaster and the Lune Valley, Preston and Ribble Valley, Chorley, and West Lancs. Active partnerships with District Councils had been formed but the budget was tight and still in deficit. Difficult decisions remain to be taken, however, particularly if services are under used and it was regrettable that the information centres had recently been victims of the cutbacks.

A Punctuality Partnership had been formed with bus operators to address need and potential growth as well as the quality of services.

He then referred to the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Clitheroe rail line. Future aspirations included a link to Skipton with 2 trains per hour, new stations at Skelmersdale and Cottam Parkway, a passing loop on the South Fylde line to intensify services, and an upgrade of Chorley station to gain Access for All accreditation.

Finally LCC is looking to the future to address a better integrated connectivity system, devolution of powers from DfT, HS2, and the future of funding for public transport. Environmental concerns were also high on the agenda with emphasis on autonomous vehicles, future technology and alternative fuels.

In subsequent discussion subjects were:

- Inconsistency of timetables and connectivity leading to passengers using cars to transport hubs – challenge both practically and financially but always on the agenda.
- Information Centre closures – regrettable but difficult financial decision. However discussions ongoing with possible private sector operators.

- Colne – Skipton rail link – significant cost and business case needs to be assessed.
- Bus deregulation – seeking devolved powers.
- Bus Operator cooperation – regular positive dialogue.

### 3. What's happening at Transport for the North?

***Gary Bogan, Director Rail North Partnership***

***Jim Bamford, Head of Investment Planning***

Gary Bogan began by describing the principles behind TfN's demands on the Trans Pennine and Northern franchises. These included Better Connectivity, Better Passenger Information, Better Passenger Assistance, Better Affordability, Better Passenger capacity and Better Compensation. .

Trans Pennine is investing £500 million in new trains, fleet refurbishment, 13 million extra seats per annum, Smart technology, 55% increase in services connecting cities and station improvements.

Northern is investing £500 million in 101 new trains, 2000 extra services per week, additional 31,000 passenger capacity, WiFi availability, £45 million station improvements, 600 station ticket machines and 250 extra car park spaces.

The demands of the May 2018 timetable represented a massive uplift in services throughout the country but the industry was overwhelmed by the demand on resources due to delays in track upgrades and consequent driver training leading to operational shortages throughout the rest of the year. As a result a number of reviews have been commissioned, (Glaister, George, Blake James and Williams) to examine all the issues. Results so far to be inserted into operational practices include, greater resilience measures and longer turnaround periods. Summer 2019 will see the Northern service uplift achieved and the new TPE Liverpool – Glasgow service commence in the Autumn.

Future projects will see the bedding down of the transformation of services, the trans-Pennine route upgrade, the cross Manchester study, and alternative fuel options including battery powered trains possibly for the Windermere branch.

Jim Bamford introduced the thoughts behind the long term strategy of Transport for the North. It seeks a transformation across the whole of the Northern regions with consistent performance and provision standards through all franchises and transport operator provision. It features:

- Improved Connectivity and frequency
- Faster journey times for both passenger and freight services
- Improved capacity to cater for demand
- Improved standards of Accessibility
- Improved Information provision
- Upgrades of station facilities
- Improved transport integration
- Support to social fabric of communities
- Cost effectiveness without compromising provision

A number of minimum standards are desirable and include 2 trains per hour on the majority of lines and business cases are being prepared. 60 mph average speed for inter urban services, 40 mph on local services, and uplift of freight speeds by 50%. Line speed upgrades are being prioritised on the Liverpool – Manchester, Preston - Manchester and Calder Valley routes. However, unlike Scotland, reductions in journey times are not in the DfT planning. TFN believes that faster journey times can improve efficiency and frequency by network rosters releasing units for more availability. An examination is currently taking place to prove this and make recommendations.

The HLOS statement was considered at the Rail North Board in June 2017 and current upgrades, including the Liverpool – Manchester routes, the Hope Valley route, Oxford Road – Piccadilly corridor and Wigan – Lostock electrification, are all subject to bids for approval from the DfT fund of £9 billion enhancement provision. Added to this is the trans-Pennine route upgrade but at £2.9 billion, this would amount to 32% of the total fund.

In subsequent discussion the following points were raised:

- No intentions to compromise on service levels in making changes.
- Trans-Pennine freight paths - Seeking greater access and more paths
- Castlefield corridor capacity issues – Network Rail considers capable of 16 trains per hour in each direction. DfT consulted but TfN not included in discussions!

#### **4. Preston Bus today and the future**

***John Asquith, Commercial Director, Preston Bus***

Stagecoach had acquired Preston Bus in 2009 following 2 years of competition, but it was later obliged to relinquish the company due to intervention by the Competition Commission and Rotala took over.

A number of challenges were having to be faced due to the financial constraints imposed by reductions in support from Lancs. County Council. This includes reductions in subsidy with no guarantees beyond 2021 and changes to road management such as the traffic light priority being switched off. In addition usage costs of Preston bus station had increased significantly. The results of these curtailments compromise investment.

The company enjoys a good and loyal workforce but the existing establishment does not meet its needs. Staff retention has proved challenging at all levels and recruitment is a constant challenge. A perception of driving being a demeaning job makes recruitment difficult, however 60 new drivers have arrived in the last 12 months and training has been taken “in house” with a dedicated team operating from Preston for all Rotala areas.

The current depot is restricted in being able to operate to full efficiency and relocation has proved difficult so some operational changes have been made to try

and work it to the best output. A new Engineering Manager is currently being sought and it is hoped changes will stabilise matters.

Future aspirations include a new Control Room to oversee vehicle locations, performance analysis, improved journeys, GPS, live data and live intervention where required. A better brand image is required and this is expected to be achieved later this year following fleet transition. A Marketing and Publicity strategy is being put in place featuring publications, a network map, a new website, apps and more visual bus branding and appearance. Growth, meeting the increasing demands of customers, better reliability and embracing technology are all future challenges.

## 5. Points of View

In the Points of View session the following discussion points were raised:

- Noted that it was 25 years since the Clitheroe line reopening. Tributes paid to Richard Watts of LCC for his leadership of the project.
- Ongoing lobbying for use of Settle – Carlisle route for diversions rather than long distance bus replacements during WCML closures.
- Cumbria Coast line capacity restrictions – Cumbria LEP and County Council examining in light of new energy investment.
- Disabled facilities (toilets) and mistaken advice at Accrington Station.
- Climate emergency – quest for zero emissions.
- Enhanced rail electrification programme.
- Customer service at Manchester Piccadilly and Oxford Road and need for improvements on Platforms 13/14.

## 6. Light Rail – more optimism

**Tony Young, Director TWW**

**Lewis Lesley and Lincoln Shields, Preston Trampower Ltd.**

Tony Young set the scene by describing the history of tram services in the UK and the vast network that once existed. Closures in the 1930's through to the mid 1950's left only Blackpool tramway in existence. Since then Manchester, Sheffield, West Midlands, Edinburgh and Croydon have come into successful operation with Metrolink now being the largest network in the UK. A number of schemes have been proposed, with examples in Liverpool, Leeds and South Hants., but have never come to fruition due mainly to financial constraints. 10 years ago 71 schemes were under consideration but only 14 remain. A recent DfT consultation expects to report back, rather ambitiously, in 3 months! However it is forecast that, with modern environmental imperatives for transport, a new era is about to dawn.

Lewis Lesley said that pollution based illnesses cost the NHS 20% of its budget and a survey into likely usage of a new tram system in Preston returned a 80% positive response from 42% of consultees. Currently 67% of Preston's trips are by car and 6% by bus. The line is forecast to carry 1.8 million passengers per year and save 20% of car traffic along the route. With a 6 minute frequency this equates to the capacity of a 6 lane highway with no pollution.

Lincoln Shields described the route from Longridge Park & Ride to Preston Rail station via Deepdale Retail Park, the bus station, and Fishergate. Journey time is forecast to be 15 minutes end to end, and a fleet of 6 trams will be required to fulfil the service. These will be built locally in Leyland. Planning approval has been obtained and approaches to the financial markets will take place very soon. The cost of the entire project is estimated at £25 million and a construction company has already been appointed. If funding is positive work could start this summer. A number of key employers in the Preston area had pledged support to the tramway development.

In subsequent discussion the following points were raised:

- Adequate Park & Ride site at Longridge - . Large site with potential for extension
- Future expansion of network – if funding available scope to serve Docklands and south of city area already identified.
- All trams will be equipped with audible information systems.
- Construction disruption – New technology such as track laying by adhesion will minimise any potential disruption

## 7. Next Conference

Provisionally Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2019, Manchester

## Attendance

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	Name	Organisation
<i>John</i>	<i>Aaron</i>	
<i>Norman</i>	<i>Adams</i>	
<i>David</i>	<i>Armstrong</i>	
<i>John</i>	<i>Asquith</i>	<i>Preston Bus Ltd</i>
<i>Jim</i>	<i>Bamford</i>	<i>Transport for the North</i>
<i>Colin</i>	<i>Barnett</i>	
<i>Roger</i>	<i>Bell</i>	<i>Ormskirk Preston Southport Travellers Assoc.</i>
<i>Robin</i>	<i>Bence</i>	
<i>Gary</i>	<i>Bogan</i>	<i>Rail North Partnership</i>
<i>Alex</i>	<i>Bray</i>	<i>CrossCountry Trains</i>
<i>David</i>	<i>Burton</i>	<i>South East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership</i>
<i>David</i>	<i>Butterworth</i>	<i>TravelWatch NorthWest</i>
<i>Frederick</i>	<i>Consterdine</i>	
<i>Ian</i>	<i>Conway</i>	<i>Lakes Line Rail Users Group</i>
<i>Malcolm</i>	<i>Conway</i>	<i>TravelWatch NorthWest</i>
<i>Steve</i>	<i>Cullen</i>	<i>Blackpool Transport Services Ltd</i>
<i>David</i>	<i>Culshaw</i>	<i>TravelWatch NorthWest</i>
<i>Chris</i>	<i>Dale</i>	<i>TravelWatch NorthWest</i>

Alex	Dhawan	Lancaster District Bus Users Group
Stuart	Edwards	Transport Focus
David	Evans	Blackpool & Fylde Rail Users Assoc.
Donal	Farrell	
Robert	Florence	North Cheshire Rail Users Group
Alan	Goater	Chinley and Buxworth Transport Group
Paul	Grant	Lancaster & Morecambe Rail Users Group
Cedric	Green	North Cheshire Rail Users Group
Ken	Harper	Friends of the Settle Carlisle Line
Dennis	Harrison	Wirral Transport Users Association
Andrew	Hewitson	Lancashire County Council
Roger	Jones	Salford City Council
Geoff	Kerr	
Dave	Koring	Severn-Dee Travel Ltd
Peter	Lamkin	Wrexham- Bidston Rail Users Association
Mike	Laycock	Wirral Transport Users Association
Paul	Legon	Lancaster District Bus Users Group
Lewis	Lesley	Preston TramPower Ltd
Richard	Lysons	Friends of Littleborough Station
Dawn	McGough	Community Rail Cumbria
Margaret	Mitchell	
John	Moorhouse	TravelWatch NorthWest
Keith	Naylor	Friends of Patricroft station
Laura	Normansell	Virgin Trains
Christopher	Norton	Railfuture NW
John	Owen	TravelWatch NorthWest
Phil	Pearson	
Tony	Potts	Cumbrian Coast Rail Users Group
Malcolm	Richardson	Blackpool & Fylde Rail Users Assoc.
Martin	Robinson	
John	Ryan	Wirral Transport Users Association
Derek	Scott	TPS Rail
Lincoln	Shields	Preston TramPower Ltd
Vernon	Smith	Blackpool & Fylde Rail Users Assoc.
Andrew	Snowden	County Councillor Lancashire CC
Ian	Stuart	Friends of Altrincham Interchange
Rebecca	Styles	Northern Rail
Ken	Swallow	Chartered Institute of Logistics & Transport (NW)
Adrian	Swift	
Robert	Talbot	TravelWatch NorthWest
Miriam	Walton	Chinley and Buxworth Transport Group
Stephen	Waring	Electric Railway Charter

<i>Richard</i>	<i>Watts</i>	<i>Community Rail Lancashire</i>
<i>Alan</i>	<i>Whitehead</i>	<i>Tameside Council</i>
<i>Denise</i>	<i>Wilkinson</i>	<i>Visually Impaired Forum Lancashire</i>
<i>John</i>	<i>Woodman</i>	
<i>Tim</i>	<i>Young</i>	<i>TravelWatch NorthWest</i>
<i>Tony</i>	<i>Young</i>	<i>TravelWatch NorthWest</i>