

Winner of CILT award for best practice in passenger transport

promoting quality public transport.....

CONFERENCE REPORT

**Thursday 10th October 2013
 Offices of Merseytravel, Mann Island, Liverpool**

Conference kindly supported by Merseytravel and First TransPennine Express

1. Welcome and Introduction

The Chairman, Chris Dale, welcomed delegates to Liverpool and thanked Merseytravel and First TransPennine Express for their generous support to the event. He welcomed the 2 new TOWN Board members, Colin Kennington and Chris Holmes and thanked retiring member, Alan Pettener for his contribution. He also drew attention to the death of Board member, John Murray in 2012 and referred to his unstinting support and work for the organisation since it was founded 10 years ago. In addition he mentioned the valuable work of Mike Wrigley who passed away during the year.

This being the 10th anniversary of TravelWatch NorthWest he thanked all who had contributed support, time and effort over the decade and welcomed TOWN's first Chairman, Brendan O' Friel, to the conference.

He drew attention to current issues that are exercising TOWN, in particular the ongoing engineering work on the West Coast Main Line, the Bus Lane experiment in Liverpool, and the House of Commons Transport Committee's current study into Public Transport in Isolated Communities.

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

- West Coast Rail 250
- HS2 debate with the Hannah Mitchell Foundation
- Northern Trains timetable briefing & liaison meeting
- Merseytravel briefing
- TransPennine Express Stakeholder briefing
- Sustainable Transport Conference with Gov Today
- Bus Punctuality meeting

He then referred to 2 recent awards made to TOWN for its work representing passengers and a personal award to the Administrator, John Moorhouse, for his outstanding work and contribution in public transport passenger representation.

2. Welcome to Merseyside ***Cllr. Liam Robinson, Chair, Merseytravel***

Cllr. Robinson welcomed delegates to Liverpool and Merseyside and said how much the work of TWNW was appreciated in the region. He referred to the numerous important issues that currently prevailed in public transport, notably the Devolution debate, and the many government and opposition policies needing to be absorbed by all stakeholders. He mentioned that this was the 10th year of the operation of the Merseyrail franchise concession and was proud of its achievements over its 1st decade.

3. Passenger Issues – Land, Sea and Air ***Brendan O’Friel, Chair, TravelWatch, Isle of Man***

Brendan began by saying that he was delighted to have been invited to be present for TWNW’s 10th Anniversary conference and congratulated all involved in its work and successes over the decade.

When he moved to the Isle of Man he found that public transport passengers had very little representation. The Isle of Man Steam Packet ferry company was highly regulated, the bus company was government owned and operated and there was an “open skies” policy for air service operators. There appeared to be no joined up thinking between the 3 transport modes and passengers were often left to their own devices to bridge the gap.

TravelWatch Isle of Man was set up in 2007 to represent passengers and quickly became established, with a Committee of able members offering expertise in transport matters and a membership of over 200. 2 public meetings are held per annum on Saturday mornings attended by 60 – 70 delegates. Speakers on relevant topics are engaged and the events are also valuable for networking. One of the first outputs was a set of information sheets aimed at linking transport modes for passengers arriving on the Island.

TWIoM has been able to create dialogue with all 3 transport operators, all of whom had previously had little history of passenger liaison, and influence planning and inter-faces. It had influenced the improvement of the bus stop and modification of parking facilities at the airport, as well as having input to the Charter and user agreement for the ferry company. During the bus driver’s strike in 2012, suggestions for use of the steam railway as an alternative transport option had been taken up and work was ongoing in liaison with stakeholders for bus service consultations with passengers. For air travellers light regulation was being looked at and Easy Jet was now operating services alongside FlyBE although there had been some curtailment of London flights. Ongoing pressure to relevant bodies is being applied in respect of lengthened ferry crossings due to the development of the Irish Sea wind farms.

TWIoM is pleased to have been able to have a major influence in all transport matters on the Island and is now a recognised consultee by the Island’s government, all operators and stakeholders.

4. Merseytravel – where are we going? ***David Brown, Chief Executive and Director General, Merseytravel***

David began by expressing the disappointment of all PTEs following the recent government and opposition re-shuffles which will necessitate creating dialogues with new ministers and the loss of the government knowledge base built up over the last few years.

Merseyside has a comprehensive list of train operators with Merseyrail, Northern, TransPennine Express, Virgin, London Midland, East Midlands Trains and Arriva Trains operating in the region. Merseytravel operates the 25 year concession for Merseyside electric trains until 2028. It is also a co-signatory to the Northern franchise which operates until 2014. It is constantly working with all operators to achieve an integrated and acceptable network.

Merseytravel is a partner in the Rail North project which consists of 33 transport authorities in the north of England which is seeking devolution of rail operational responsibility from the DfT. It is believed that issues in the north are not understood by south eastern based officials and government. Rail North expects an interim decision of sorts this year with outline funding indications. Issues it feels need to be addressed are procurement of better rolling stock, which may realistically take 30 years, and the potential merger of the Northern and TransPennine Express franchises which would save “back-office” costs whilst retaining the quality of the TPE services. The business case will be difficult to prove and a long term view over all issues will be necessary.

The structure of the Merseyside ITA and the PTE will change to become a combined authority with Halton in 2014 and this will also assume responsibility for highways. It will be based on the model of Transport for London. There are numerous issues to confront:

- Replacement rolling stock for its 40 year old trains which carry 38 million passengers per annum now becoming a priority. The network has seen significant growth over the last 15 years.
- Leading the Liverpool city region in response to HS2 and seeking better local connectivity with it.
- Seeking better connectivity and direct train services with Scotland and Wales.
- Involvement in the northern electrification programme and the Northern Hub.

The Merseyside bus network carries 140 million passenger journeys per annum, with 13 operators, 90% of which are carried by Stagecoach and Arriva. The authority provides support of £15.3 million for services that are deemed socially necessary. Current initiatives include Quality Partnerships; a better Bus Fund; improved information through real time presentation, journey planners and Apps; clean bus technology; combined control room; maintaining and increasing the level of competitive tender responses; greater collaboration with districts.

Issues to be confronted are funding and affordability; future of bus priority lanes; highway maintenance; differential fare tariffs between commercial and supported services; interfaces between operators; Smart ticketing offering multi modal travel; level of young persons fares (currently thought to be too high); future of BSOG; modernised information systems and presentation; scrutiny of fares; inter operator engagement; Merseylink review; concession review (currently not sustainable at £41.4 million).

In discussion the following issues were raised:

- Halton Curve – More optimistic. In dialogue with Welsh Government and other stakeholders looking to achieve a joint approach for cross border transport matters.
- Liverpool South Parkway – studying connectivity issues with John Lennon Airport.
- Bus lane suspension – 9 month trail then to be reviewed in consultation with users.
- Rail services to Scotland and Birmingham – Priority for London services which need more frequency. Business cases and study of passenger flows for fast inter-regional services.
- Smart Cards – need to move forward.
- Customer engagement – Forum every 10 weeks and improving customer liaison and dialogue matters.
- Merseytram – not in foreseeable future and now off the agenda.. Concentration on improving Merseyrail system and bus network.
- Rail North funding for better trains – better influence by local control.

5. “Just a Minute”

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:

- Shortcomings of web based information systems. PTE, operator sites and those of Traveline and Transport Direct assume users have local knowledge.
- Extension of car park provision at stations as many are now full after 9.00am.
- Local investment in and modernisation of connecting services with HS2.
- Bus connectivity following the severance of previous through routes.

6. Looking after bus passengers interests

Mrs. Beverley Bell, Senior & North West Area Traffic Commissioner

Mrs. Bell described the role of Traffic Commissioners. They are responsible for the licensing and regulation of those who operate heavy goods vehicles, buses and coaches, and the registration of local bus services.

In public transport terms the main objective is to improve the punctuality of bus services. There is a need for a debate on a regional and national level to identify barriers and solutions. A document entitled “Draft Statutory Guidance on local bus services” is currently out for consultation and Mrs Bell is anxious to receive feedback and responses from bus users. Headline points are the expected standards of bus services, an end to early

running and consideration of how much in journey delay is acceptable to passengers. The deadline for responses is 13th November and the document is available to view on the Traffic Commissioner's website:

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/traffic-commissioners

Mrs Bell would like to see local authorities have a more pro-active approach to route management, provision of better information systems to passengers as a high priority, and better enforcement by VOSA which is currently poor at bus performance. The Traffic Commissioners are now working in liaison with Passenger Focus. There needs to be avoidance of concessionary timetabling allowing over generous timings between operating points and the trials of the bus lane suspension in Liverpool will be watched with great interest. This will all contribute to a real debate on how buses can operate better for passengers.

7. West Coast Mainline – disruption to journeys

Robert Talbot, Chair, Lakes Line User Group & Director, TWNW

The Lakes Line User Group has ongoing concerns about continual disruptions to train services for engineering work particularly at weekends and during public holiday periods. The highly publicised upgrade of the WCML, supposed to have been completed a few years ago, is still ongoing north of Lancaster and there is likely to be further disruption to services over the next 2 years at least.

There is great concern that these disruptions, timed during leisure periods, are damaging the economies of regions like the Lake District, Scotland and other destinations that rely on tourism as their main economy. Previous passenger measures had proved that trains were now busier during these periods and the train companies themselves claim that the most significant part of their business comes from leisure travellers. It is also clear that international visitors have been badly affected by these disruptions as they have no advance information and often find it difficult to navigate them. However reports based on observations made by user groups have received scant attention from Network Rail and train operators.

Whilst it is recognised that engineering work does have to take place and there is a consequent disruption to services, more recognition needs to be given to passenger comfort and care. Passengers have often been faced with replacement coach services over large distances, sometimes as much as 200 miles. It is an interesting contrast that passengers south of Birmingham have the convenience of trains operating over alternative routes whilst in the north routes over the Settle – Carlisle and South West Scotland via Dumfries lines are now rarely used.

Observations of rail replacement coach services have shown inconsistencies in provision with a variety of vehicles being used, some very cramped, and too often little attention by operating staff. The contrast is that there have been excellent examples of management in the past at Stoke on Trent and Arnside and it is concerning that such best practice is not heeded.

The recent closure of the WCML between Preston and Wigan exhibited some strange operating practices with Virgin's re-routed trains seeing little patronage whilst the shorter TransPennine Express services to and from Scotland being heavily overloaded. An

examination of the operating arrangement revealed some obvious anomalies that resulted in mis-management of passenger flows and a poor approach to planning and consultation, together with a confusing set of passenger information and publications.

It is believed that continuation of these poor practices over the next 2 years will be detrimental, not only to the passenger experience and the economies of destinations served, but will also cause permanent harm to the rail industry as the rail offer will be seen as unattractive in comparison with the private car.

In discussion it was proposed that a Panel be appointed consisting of the relevant rail companies, Network Rail, TOWN, WCR 250 and relevant passenger user groups to plan operations well in advance of future disruptions and for Network Rail to publish its programme for engineering work 2 years in advance to allow sufficient time to find acceptable solutions.

8. Next Conference

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

Attendance

Name	Organisation
Adrian Dunning	NorthWest Transport Roundtable
Alan Cushion	Wirral Transport Users Association
Alan Wilson	Kendal Bus Users
Alex Naughton	Liverpool Chamber of Commerce
Angus Tilston	Wirral Transport Users Association
Barry Dobson	Arriva Merseyside
Beverley Bell	Senior & NW Traffic Commissioner
Brendan O'Friel	TravelWatch Isle of Man
Brian Grey	Wirral Transport Users Association
Cedric Green	North Cheshire Rail Users Group
Chris Anslow	Lancashire County Council
Chris Dale	TOWN
Chris Holmes	TOWN
Chris Jarvis	Institute of Transport Administration
Cllr Liam Robinson	Merseytravel
Colin Barnett	Bus Users UK
Colin Kennington	TOWN
Craig Harrop	Northern Rail
Craig White	Transport for Greater Manchester
Dave Culshaw	Friends of Hindley station
David Armstrong	
David Brown	Merseytravel
David Burton	South East Lancs Rail Action Partnership
David Butterworth	TOWN
David Huber	Stockport MBC
David Print	Merseyrail
David Thrower	
David Wood	TravelWatch Midlands West
Dennis Harrison	Wirral Transport Users Association

Elisabeth Tasker	Stagecoach Merseyside & S Lancs
Fred Consterdine	Crewe & Shrewsbury Passr Ass.
Gabriel Drew	East Cheshire RUG
Geoff Kerr	
Howard Farrall	Arriva Merseyside
Ian Allsopp	Wirral Transport Users Association
Ian McDermott	Greater Manchester Transport Forum
Ian Stuart	
Ian Watson	
Janet Briggs	North Cheshire Rail Users Group
Jim Trotman	Furness & Lakes Lines CRP
John Moorhouse	TWNW
John Aaron	
John Culshaw	Mattersons Cranes
John Hart	TWNW
John Owen	TWNW
John Ryan	Wirral Transport Users Association
Jonathan Cooke	First TransPennine Express
Jordan Sargeant	Passenger Focus
Katie Panteli	Passenger Focus
Kathryn O'Brien	First TransPennine Express
Keith Pennyfather	
Ken Swallow	CILT North West
Lillian Burns	TWNW
Malcolm Richardson	Blackpool & Fylde RUA
Margaret Mitchell	
Martin Taylor	Arriva North West
Matthew Andrews	Passenger Focus
Maurice Duckworth	First Rail Support Ltd
Mike Laycock	Wirral Transport Users Association
Niall Baker	MRUK Research
Paul Byrne	
Paul Fawcett	TWNW
Peter Garvey	Greater Manchester Transport Campaign
Peter Lamkin	Wrexham & Birkenhead RUA
Peter Robinson	TWNW
Phil Halewood	Merseytravel
Preva Crossley	Friends of Hindley & Westhoughton
Richard Lysons	Friends of Littleborough Station
Richard Rollins	TWNW
Rob Jones	Stagecoach Merseyside & S Lancs
Robert Talbot	TWNW
Roland Graham	North West Active Travel Network
Roy McDonald	Roy McDonald Consulting Ltd
Sally Buttifant	Mid Cheshire CRP
Susan Mullen	Confederation of Passenger Transport NW
Tony Barker	Halton Borough Council
Tony Young	TWNW