

***Winner of CILT award for best practice in passenger transport (2013)
promoting quality public transport.....***

CONFERENCE REPORT

Thursday 21st October 2021

“GETTING BACK TO PUBLIC TRANSPORT”

Mechanics Centre, Manchester

Conference kindly supported by the Rail Industry and Transport Focus

1. Welcome and Introduction

The Chairman, David Butterworth, welcomed delegates to the Conference and thanked the Rail Industry and Transport Focus for their support. This was the first face to face Conference since the last event in Lancaster in February 2020. He also said that this was the first attended Conference since the sudden death of former Chairman Chris Dale in March 2020. He paid tribute to the dedicated work of Chris on behalf of TOWNW and the many other public transport organisations he worked tirelessly for. He informed delegates that a memorial bench had recently been provided at Macclesfield station and 20 people had attended the dedication ceremony.

He referred to the 3 virtual Conferences TOWNW had been able to organise in March, April and May this year and thanked delegates and Speakers who were able to attend through Zoom Conferencing on the Internet.

He then launched the Annual Review which detailed the work of TOWNW during the last year and thanked John Moorhouse and members of the Board of Directors for their dedicated work in the many programmes and projects that were undertaken. He drew attention to the Accounts Section and reminded members that TOWNW is currently operating with no formal funding flows and a small operating loss had been experienced during the year and so there is some uncertainty over the long-term future of the organisation. He encouraged delegates to contribute at least £10 towards the costs of the Conference. He also referred to the various Consultations and Issues that TOWNW had responded to or commented upon including:

- Battery Train developments
- Wigan – Bolton electrification scheme
- Future Bus Services Plan for Cumbria
- TfN De-carbonisation Strategy
- WCML Engineering Proposals for 2022

- Road Closures and Impact on local bus services.

Finally he mentioned the Cheshire Best Stations Awards and the contribution made by members of TWNW in carrying out inspections, a task that Chris Dale used to perform. TWNW will be pleased to carry on this work in future years of required.

2. Welcome to Manchester and a LTA Perspective ***Cllr. Roger Jones, GM Transport Committee***

Roger welcomed delegates to Manchester and paid warm tribute to Chris Dale.

Greater Manchester's Transport Committee has 21 members drawn from the constituent local authorities. The Mayor, Andy Burnham had received 67% of the vote at the last Mayoral election which exhibited the level of support for his policies. His No.1 priority is Public Transport and his aspiration is to gain full control of the bus network and the coordination of train services in Greater Manchester.

Road congestion is now at an extremely critical level, even worse than the period immediately before the pandemic. Bus services are facing major punctuality challenges as a result. Rail Management is also in a state of flux with much uncertainty and confusion as to who is currently in charge. These are examples of the need to push Transport issues higher up the Government's agenda.

He referred to the appointment of Chris Boardman as an advisor and influencer in obtaining investment funding towards Cycling and Walking amenities in the Greater Manchester region. The impact of a very influential personality had been extremely helpful in giving greater focus on all transport issues.

Bus services are now at 90% of pre-pandemic levels but tram and train services are much less. Government funding subsidy will be vital for the future. An example of a successful project is the Leigh Guided Busway project which now carries upwards of 28,000 passengers each week. The project encountered significant opposition at the outset but was now deemed to be a major success.

3. TransPennine Express ***Joe Munro, Project Manager, (Customer)***

Pre-pandemic 2019 had been a key delivery date in the rail industry with intensified timetabled services and fleet of new trains. New 5 coach trains had been introduced offering an additional 13,714 seats, 196 more toilets and 176 cycle spaces on daily services. The network has been expanded to provide services between Liverpool and Glasgow, Newcastle and Edinburgh and adding a Redcar extension to Middlesbrough services. Unfortunately the pandemic had resulted in reductions in the train plan but this was now in process of re-introduction. The timetable commencing in December 2021 will bring an intensified level of trains to the core cross Pennine route, the Newcastle – Edinburgh section re-started and a further extension from Redcar to Saltburn. It is expected that most of the timetable will be in operation with completion, including the Liverpool to Glasgow services, from the May 2022 timetable. This is being pursued under the "Build Back Better" label.

During the pandemic there had been challenges with driver and train crew training and Refresher courses of route knowledge, rules and regulations and traction knowledge as well as the new trains familiarity were either delayed or slowed and often had to be delivered on a “one to one” basis.

Current passenger demand stands at 68% weekdays and 72% weekends and it is noticeable that leisure travel has increased more significantly than commuting and business travel. Future challenges will be further route upgrades and decarbonisation issues that will need thought about train fuel and power.

4. Making a Positive Impact for the North ***Craig Harrop, Head of Trains and Stations, Northern Rail***

The pandemic impact brought a major set of challenges for staff and their updated competence and had resulted in a slower roll out of new trains and investments. However there are now positive signs of recovery.

Northern’s stated Vision is “Make a positive impact in the North of England in all we do and all we serve.” Currently Northern operates 2800 services daily, (30% of which are electrified), serves almost 500 stations, 175 parliamentary constituencies and provides two thirds of train journeys throughout the North. It employs 7000 staff and operated 12 different train fleets.

For every £1 spent Northern’s delivery value brings £2.50 in economic value, £1.84 in welfare benefit, £1.24 GVA and investment of a quarter of £1 billion in its services. All 101 new trains are now in service and a fund of £250,000 has been allocated for investment towards station accessibility. 600 new ticket vending machines have been installed and ongoing upgrades to develop customer support are being introduced including an avatar to provide live personal guidance for users.

Recovery of pre-pandemic levels is significant with leisure travellers at 83%, business at 70% whilst commuting is still low at 32%. Use of the advance fare and online booking facilities have increased by 172% and 50% respectively. Peak travel days are now Tuesday to Thursday. A new marketing campaign has been launched and heavily features duo tickets and advance purchase discounts.

5. The Bus Operator’s View ***Mark Mageean, Operations Manager, Stagecoach Manchester***

Stagecoach Manchester operates from 6 depots spread strategically around the city region. TfGM maintains the network of services

The pandemic had brought challenges of extra cleaning regimes, imposition of face coverings, duplicate services to provide for social distancing capacity issues and some minor reductions in services.

Recovery has seen 85% weekend and 75% of weekday patronage return. Non-Commuter demand returned fastest. Changing customer habits have been noticed and Stagecoach is having to react appropriately. It is currently embarking on a marketing campaign featuring leisure travel opportunities offering a set of flexible tickets. 60% of travel is now purchased by contactless means. Traffic congestion, which had been relaxed during the main pandemic period has now returned but not

yet at pre-pandemic level but is expected to. Like the railways peak days are now Tuesday – Thursday.

The company is facing staffing challenges with pay increases, recruitment following significant numbers of drivers leaving for jobs with better social hours, even if they are lower paid, and the current bottleneck at DVLA in obtaining PSV licences for new recruits.

The next 12 months will bring about requirements to meet:

- Continued Growth with changing consumer habits
- Mobile and flexi-tickets demand
- Continued Driver recruitment and training
- Service and timetable adjustments to meet need and demand
- End of Recovery Funding in April 2022
- Increasing traffic congestion

6. Transport for the North

Salim Patel, Programme Manager, Rail

Transport for the North is the Single Voice for transport issues in the North of England. It seeks investment to improve rail connectivity and is in constant dialogue and liaison with industry stakeholders and particularly the emerging GB Railways body. It hosts a North of England Contingency Group consisting of Transport Officers of local authorities and rail companies.

It is noticeable that work practices are changing with less office based and so customers need different products to meet their needs. This includes more flexible ticketing and transport products and timetables. Leisure travel is seeing a significant expansion which also needs a better set of products.

A 5-year Recovery Plan is being assembled which will feature many of the needs and a greener network. Some campaigns will be taking place suggesting alternative transport options as the North West is now leading the UK in demand recovery.

7. Open Session with Speakers Panel and Yvonne Fox Burmby, Transport Focus

This session was to invite questions and discussion with the Conference Speakers joined by Yvonne Fox-Burmby from Transport Focus. Yvonne opened the proceedings by highlighting the monthly survey with 2000 passengers into habits and trends and the recently launched public transport survey using 4000 contributors. Headline results indicate an 89% satisfaction with rail, 88% with bus. Satisfaction with value for money is down on previous levels. Full details are available on the Transport Focus website.

It is noticeable that confidence is growing slowly but volatile and commuting patterns are extremely variable but may dictate future segment demand.

Q. Who controls train service delivery - Operators or DfT?

A. Operators have to prioritise key routes alongside crew availability. Timetable delivery lies with Operators who determine the resource. Building still ongoing to achieve a stable timetable.

Q. Is the Stagecoach cleaning regime sufficient?

A. Cleaning should be extremely thorough with special attention to touch points. Any issues should be reported.

Q. When will full integration and coordination of public transport be achieved?

A. Aspiration is towards Smart ticketing but still a long way to go to positively compare with European neighbours.

Q. Can the disparity in pay levels between public transport modes be harmonised?

A. Bus staff pay has always been less than train. Very difficult to achieve and would result in higher fare levels.

Q. When will the TVM Avatar be operational?

A. Likely early next year.

Q. What is the level of train services now compared with pre-pandemic?

A. 88% now. 90% from December timetable.

Q. Can face covering announcement be strengthened?

A. Changes are being made to announcements to make them more consistent. Passenger compliance varies from area to area.

Q. When will flexible timetabling be introduced?

A. It is an aspiration for the future but will take some time to achieve.

Q. Why is the Ordsall curve restricted to 1 train per hour?

A. MRTF short term solution pending future infra-structure enhancements.

Q. Can redundant infra-structure be used rather than being disposed of?

A. Focus is on operational need and increasing use of current infra-structure together with recycling of train units for alternative uses.

8. Date of Next Conference

February or March 2022, Liverpool? TBA

Attendance:

John	Aaron	
Norman	Adams	
Simon	Barber	Mid Cheshire RUA
Roger	Barton	Goyt Vallry RUA
Michael	Battman	Mid Cheshire RUA Ormskirk Preston Southport Travellers Assoc.
John	Berry	
Warren	Bray	Greater Manchester Transport Committee
Norman	Briggs	Greater Manchester Transport Committee
David	Butterworth	TravelWatch NorthWest
Roy	Chapman	TravelWatch NorthWest

Rob	Cox	Keolis Amey Metrolink
David	Culshaw	TravelWatch NorthWest
Ian	Davis	Community Rail Network
Sandra	Dutson	
Robert	Florence	North Cheshire RUG
Yvonne	Fox-Burmby	
Jim	Froggatt	TW East Midlands
Alan	Goater	Chinley and Buxworth Transport Group
Paul	Grant	Lancaster & Morecambe RUG
Dennis	Harrison	
Philip	Harrison	
Craig	Harrop	Northern Trains
Kieran	Jarvis	TransPennine Express
Roger	Jones	TfGM Committee
Neve	Kavanagh	NorthernTrains
Peter	Lamkin	Wrexham Bidston RUA
Mike	Laycock	Wirral Transport Users Association
Michael	Machin	Lancaster & Morecambe RUG
Mark	Mageean	Stagecoach Manchester
Lucja	Majewski	TransPennine Express
Margaret	Mitchell	
John	Moorhouse	TravelWatch NorthWest
Joe	Munro	TransPennine Express
John	Owen	TravelWatch NorthWest
Salim	Patel	Transport for the North
Stuart	Patrick	Friends of Rose Hill
Roma	Patten	TravelWatch NorthWest
Malcolm	Richardson	Blackpool & Fylde Rail Users Association
Mike	Roberts	Railway Mission
Owain	Roberts	Northern Trains
Richard	Rollins	TravelWatch NorthWest
John	Ryan	Wirral Transport Users Association
Andrew	Saunders	Manchester Airport
Ian	Stuart	
Robert	Talbot	TravelWatch NorthWest
Paul	Townley	First Manchester
Roger	Tripp	
Miriam	Walton	Chinley and Buxworth Transport Group
Alex	Woodall	Transport for Greater Manchester
Peter	Yates	Action for Yorkshire Transport
Tim	Young	TravelWatch NorthWest