

# TravelWatch NORTHWEST

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## **Closure of Manchester Airport station January/ February 2015 – Rail Replacement Services**



*(photo : Chris Dale)*

**April 2015**

## **Closure of Manchester Airport station January/ February 2015**

### **1. Introduction**

1.1 Manchester Airport station was completely closed between Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> January and Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> February inclusive to complete work on a fourth platform and associated track and signalling work. TravelWatch NorthWest undertook some on the ground monitoring of this work, riding on trains and replacement road services to test the effectiveness of alternative services and the passenger experience.

1.2 Replacement coaches operated between Manchester Piccadilly and Manchester Airport and between Heald Green and Manchester Airport.

1.3 In total **19** journeys were made as follows -

**8** journeys were made from Piccadilly to the Airport.

**7** journeys were made from the Airport to Piccadilly.

**2** journeys were made from Heald Green to the Airport

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### **2. Piccadilly (& beyond) – Airport (8 journeys)**

2.1 One journey commenced at Preston where there was little information and no on-train message until departure from Oxford Road.

2.2 There were directional posters on the platforms at Piccadilly station displaying an illustration of a bus and text “Rail Replacement Service”. It would have been better to say “Airport Bus Service” with an illustration of a ‘plane as well as a bus for the benefit of international travellers.

2.3 The directional posters did not repeat in Piccadilly after leaving the platforms. They were not apparent in the Concourse (especially to the uninitiated) and passengers were left to their own devices to find the bus stop on the road ramp. One shopper found that the actual exit from the station was not obvious.

2.4 There were no visible dedicated staff on Piccadilly station other than the usual personnel.

2.5 The bus calling point was convenient and obvious though not labelled as such. A locational Board would have been useful.

2.6 On arrival at the Airport there was a general lack of reception/directional staff to help passengers/ direct to lifts.

### **3. Heald Green – Airport (2 journeys)**

3.1 On 28<sup>th</sup> January through bus/coach services from Piccadilly to the Airport were suspended because of a road accident. Information about using the alternative train to Heald Green was not clear. The Departure screen for Manchester Airport was confusing as it gave xx.14 etc. as alternative train services to Heald Green. Fortunately the shopper's arrival coincided with a station announcement to join the Heald Green (Wilmslow) train and catch a replacement bus from Heald Green to the Airport.

3.2 On both train journeys made to Heald Green good on-train announcements were made regarding the connecting bus service.

3.3 At Heald Green there was only general signage regarding the work at Manchester Airport with no directional signs to coaches although it was fairly obvious where the coach went from. There were 4/5 dedicated staff at Heald Green but they were not on the platform to assist passengers with luggage etc. and passengers had to walk over the bridge, many carrying heavy luggage.

3.4 Also buses from Heald Green to the Airport were, on one occasion, being shown as trains from platform 2.

### **4. Airport – Piccadilly (7 journeys)**

4.1 Passengers coming from flights were not warned about the replacement bus service until the station "bridge." An "A" Board facing Terminal 1 said "No trains" and directed passengers to Rail Replacement Services departure points in the bus station. There was no "A" Board facing the approach from Terminal 2.

4.2 Staff in the ticket office area were not identifying passengers needing help and there were no staff on the "bridge" to help passengers. On one occasion 6 staff in high visibility vests were noted in the large concourse adjacent to the bus station happily chatting and laughing amongst themselves and making no effort to seek out passengers needing help.

4.3 At the ticket office level a sign said "station closed rail replacement buses from stands L/M at ground transport interchange". It was a longish walk to those stands (which were at the furthest end of the bus interchange). At the bus station poster information regarding bus departures was plentiful but not always apparent (just some small paper notices taped to the wall). Departures were displayed on the electronic departures board

4.4 At the bus station staff were positioned at the gates L/M at the far end of the bus station but were not apparent on approaches. On at least one occasion stand K was in use due to a door failure on L/M. Reporters recorded mixed views on the availability and positioning of staff to help passengers – e.g. staff standing outside the waiting area and not making much effort to assist passengers unless approached. By and large though they did call out (in English) to passengers when the bus was ready to depart.

4.5 There were two instances of staff asking if passengers had rail tickets but there was no proper ticket inspection at all.

4.6 Some coaches had a small notice on the front of the bus giving the destination (Manchester Piccadilly) as well as saying "Rail replacement".

4.7 On one occasion the Electronic Screen at stands L/M only showed a 12.35 direct coach to Piccadilly. (This departed at 12.45 and arrived at Piccadilly at 13.05). However a second coach was noted on the stand but there was no information where it was going. On that occasion there was no apparent information regarding intermediate stations on the route between Manchester Airport and Piccadilly.

## **5. Airport – Heald Green (2 journeys)**

5.1 In addition to the points above for the arrangements at Manchester Airport the two journeys made were quick and comfortable. However on one occasion there were no staff available at Heald Green to help passengers to the station across a busy main road.

## **6. General comments and conclusions**

6.1 In general comfortable coaches were used with adequate capacity when surveyed but there was no space for prams or wheelchairs. Luggage was conveyed in the boot and loaded by staff. One litter strewn, cold coach was encountered.

6.2 There was a lack of destination displays on coaches – "Rail replacement" stickers and in a small number of instances a small poster displaying the actual destination were provided. Digital displays were not used (see the front cover photo). Some coaches had no information regarding their intended route at the front of the vehicle. Some had route stickers in the windscreen, but these were unhelpful. Instead of changing the sticker for each individual journey, both directions were displayed at the same time. This was not too problematic on simple services such as this, but could be confusing where multiple routes are operating.

6.3 In the main no ticket inspections took place on the coaches – we continue to regret this omission.

6.4 In general a recurring theme picked up at all locations is that dedicated staff were often not taking a more proactive approach to looking after passengers especially those encumbered with heavy luggage. There were, by and large, plenty of staff around but frequently tending to ignore individual passenger needs.

6.5 The operation at the Airport was observed to be less professional than at Piccadilly. At the beginning of the blockade, staff at Manchester Airport were active in their approach to intending passengers, but this was not the situation on later visits, where passengers had to actively seek assistance.

6.6 Much of the operation was reasonably acceptable but there is clearly still room for improvement.

6.7 In our conclusions to a previous report on Disrupted Rail Journeys, published in 2011 (available at [www.travelwatch-northwest.org.uk](http://www.travelwatch-northwest.org.uk)), we recommended, *inter alia*, the following -

- Properly train all customer facing staff, including bus drivers, in Customer Care, corporate responsibility and on the issues that they will face when being questioned by passengers.
- Ensure sufficient staff are available to deal with passenger needs and that they (including bus drivers) actively “look” for passengers in need of help and direction, with particular regard to less mobile passengers. Over-staff rather than under-staff.

6.8 From the limited evidence of this survey at Manchester Airport, there is clearly some progress to be made towards these objectives.

John Moorhouse  
Company Secretary

### ***Appendix - Survey Form***