

promoting quality public transport.....

Minutes of the 11th meeting of the Forum held on Saturday 10th February 2007 at the Crewe Arms Hotel, Crewe.

Brendan O’Friel in the Chair

07/1/1F INTRODUCTION

The Chairman welcomed delegates and members of the public. He explained that the purpose of TravelWatch is to represent ‘joined up transport’ in the region from the perspective of the passenger. This was the first time the Forum had been held in Crewe. A few changes to the published agenda were necessary as a result of unforeseen absence of the presenters concerned. The Chairman was pleased to announce the formation of TravelWatch Isle of Man and commented favourably on the smooth transition between his arrival by air at Liverpool JL Airport and the Forum venue.

07/1/2F ATTENDEES AND APOLOGIES

Those attending and those who tendered their apologies are listed at the end of these minutes.

07/1/3F MINUTES OF THE FORUM HELD ON 7TH OCTOBER 2006 IN LIVERPOOL

These were accepted as a true and correct record and were signed by the Chairman.

07/1/4F MATTERS ARISING

- **Family/Senior Railcard anomalies** - The problems raised will be considered in due course.
- **CrossCountry Franchise** - Despite intensive lobbying it now seems unlikely that significant changes will be made by the DfT to the franchise plan. Passenger counts have been carried out by Passenger Focus and analysed by members of TWNW and TWWM. The focus is now on the opportunities for passengers to interchange at stations other than Birmingham New Street, e.g. Wolverhampton, Cheltenham, Stafford, Banbury and Derby. TWNW will reserve judgement on whether the new franchise effectively serves its passengers.
- **Disabled Access to Stations** - Mark Barker of Northern Rail announced that there is a plan to improve access to the outer platforms at Oxford Road (particularly problematic) and also at Cheadle Hulme, Hazel Grove, Marple and Littleborough using funding from the government’s Access For All programme. Certain other stations will be dealt with through their respective operators.

07/1/5F TRAVELWATCH NORTH WEST UPDATE

- Peter Robinson explained that registration of the organisation as a Community Interest Company (CIC) is in progress. Members of the shadow board have been appointed. They are Peter Robinson (chairman), Chris Dale (vice-chairman), John Owen, Brendan O’Friel, David Butterworth, Coun Bert Grange, Lillian Burns and David Robinson. The first meeting of the shadow board will be held on 22nd February. The board will be subject to formal election at the Annual General Meeting. Attendees at the Forum were invited to apply for membership of the company, using application forms provided. Peter expressed thanks to those who are retiring from the present executive committee for the hard work they have put in over the years.
- John Moorhouse explained that funding is still an issue. Substantive funding from North West Regional Development Agency is unlikely to continue so it will be important to secure support from other agencies. There have been some promises already made for 2007/8, including a commitment from Merseytravel and a possibility of support from GMPTE. The Business Plan sets out the programme for the next year or so. Advice on where to seek funding will be most welcome. It is likely that some funding may be linked to specific projects.

07/1/6F PRESENTATIONS

1. Crewe Gateway Project by Michael Ross (Transport Coordinator, Policy & Projects, Cheshire County Council).

- Michael gave an overview of this exciting project which will significantly improve the entrance buildings and approaches to Crewe station.
- The anticipated cost of the project is £38m, provided by the DfT as part of the regional ten-year transport programme and the NWDA in their regional economic strategy, together with support from Network Rail, Virgin Trains, possible EU funding and income from commercial lettings.
- The new transport interchange will feature a landmark entrance and concourse building with retail units, a multi-story car park providing a net gain of around 600 spaces (the existing car park will be closed), renovations to the overbridge and platforms, bus and pedestrian-only access to the road bridge with taxis and drop-off directed to an area on Weston Road.
- Partners are Cheshire County Council, Cheshire and Warrington Economic Alliance, Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council, Manchester Airport, Network Rail, North West Development Agency, Railway Heritage Trust and Virgin Trains.
- The final outcome of the project is dependent on firm funding, traffic re-organisation, agreement with Royal Mail to re-site their present facility, partnership with Network Rail and Virgin Trains to achieve improvements to the station roofs, platforms and passenger facilities and the impact of the 2008 WCML timetable.
- Comments on the proposed scheme are invited by 30th April 2007.

During the following lively discussion it was noted that Manchester Airport are now playing down the possibility of incorporating a remote check-in at Crewe station. The aim is to achieve a high quality, regular rail service between Crewe and the airport. Cycle parking will be provided. Shops within the concourse could include mini Tesco or M&S. Cheshire County Council's funding is via the LTP. The project price does not cover the costs of on-station improvements, with the exception of additional parking provision. The scheme includes a re-organisation of bus access and possibly routes, but these are subject to commercial bus operator consent. It was agreed that signage off the M6 motorway would encourage public transport use from Crewe Gateway.

2. Station Access Audits - this presentation was cancelled due to the absence of the speaker.

A refreshment break was taken at this point.

3. Seniors' Concessionary Bus Travel

a. The operator's view by Jonathon Backhouse of Backhouse Jones, Solicitors.

- The legislative framework for concessionary fares is extremely confusing, involving the 1985 Act and the 1986 Regulations (which enabled concessionary travel) and the 2000 Act (which guaranteed half-fares for the eligible groups) which was later amended to allow free travel. Whereas the 1985 act set out the rules very clearly, the 2000 Act merely stated that 'the operator shall be reimbursed' without making it clear how this must be done. Therefore there has been a high degree of ambiguity.
- Operators are very happy to cooperate with concessionary fares schemes as it allows for the provision of more frequent services, given that more people will use the buses. However the operator needs to ensure that he/she is appropriately paid. The basic principle is that the subsidy is for the person who travels on the bus. If he/she does not travel then no subsidy should be paid. The 1985 Act laid down the principle that the operator shall be 'no better off, no worse off' as a result of the acceptance of concessionary fare passengers. However, the principle of 'generation', whereby the bus operator should not get paid for any passenger who travels because there is a scheme, has caused serious problems for operators as the uptake of concessionary schemes has been much higher than originally expected. The operators are clearly not able to make a profit, or even cover their operating costs, when providing services for all the additional passengers who are using the concessionary scheme because it is there.
- When the half-fare scheme applied the operator would at least get some money from all the extra passengers who chose to make use of it. During that period there was general satisfaction among operators. With the arrival of the free fare scheme there was a massive increase in patronage. There had been expected to be generation (increase in usage) of around 30% whereas in reality it was between 70% and 90%, and even a 1000% increase in patronage in one instance in the South West. Travel between Exeter and Plymouth has become 'a great day out'! Understandably the operator expects a reasonable average fare for each and every passenger.

- Most schemes involve a 'fixed pot' scheme of reimbursement, beyond which the operator will not be paid any extra even though there may be a massive increase in passengers. Some reimbursement schemes involve a repayment per passenger travelled, based on an average fare. There are no problems in Scotland and Wales, where average fare reimbursement schemes are operated, even to the extent that they are becoming multi-modal.
- In England there are many individual schemes without an underlying standard. Recent appeals by operators have rejected fixed-pot schemes, unless they are voluntary. Also there must be an annual review to assess whether repayments have been sufficient. Finally the operator is entitled to all additional costs, with no cap, with a reasonable return on any capital invested to accommodate the generated patronage.

b. The passengers' view by Paul Fawcett (replacing Phil Tonks who was absent).

- There is to be a Concessionary Fares Bill outlining the scheme of free bus transport for eligible groups from 2008, with funding for the scheme based on the rate support grant and on the demographics of the area. There will be powers for the DfT to introduce modified forms of reimbursement. The scheme may be extended, perhaps in terms of time, e.g. before 09.30, and also the mode of transport.
- The scheme will be limited to registered local services, i.e. services which pick up at least once every 15 miles. It was noted that some National Express services (normally excluded) become 'local services' in some rural areas.
- It is likely that reimbursement will be taken over by the DfT rather than Travel Concession Authorities (TCAs), perhaps by means of the bus operators' grant.
- Popular places like Blackpool and Chester (etc) are likely to suffer as many non-local council tax payers will use the local services. How will the repayment process be worked out?
- Re-regulation of bus services in urban areas may make the organisation of the scheme easier but there are still likely to be problems in rural areas.
- There is already evidence of cutting of subsidised services in urban areas where the uptake of concessionary travel has been high, e.g. Tyneside (Nexus), in order that the authority can cover the cost of reimbursement. However in Cumbria, for example, funding has exceeded the cost of applying the scheme so it has been possible for the authority to introduce additional tourist services, e.g. in Borrowdale. Therefore it is not a level playing field across England.

There then followed a lively question/answer session. Among the points raised were: Operators have reacted strongly to ring-fenced finance. Many concessionary passengers are using buses for one-stop journeys which seriously affect timekeeping. Some non-concessionary services, e.g. Blackpool trams, are suffering as most concessionary passengers use the parallel buses. There has been a significant take-up of the scheme among the active elderly in the Lake District where the cost of reimbursement has risen significantly but Stagecoach has not increased its service provision proportionately. Conversely those elderly people who live out in the country cannot reach a bus service and have no access to concessionary travel, whereas previously the tokens provided allowed the occasional use of taxis. There is no provision for use on local rail services, so a person living in Arnside wishing to visit a friend in Grange over Sands must go all the way via Kendal on free buses rather than use the brief train journey across the Kent estuary. Likewise there is high demand for free bus travel between Ulverston and Barrow whilst the trains are running with plenty of spaces. It was suggested that the high uptake of concessionary usage may result in the operator raising the fares for paying passengers.

It was noted that the government does not support the principle of centralised reimbursement or even reimbursement at shire county level nor does it support ring-fencing of money provided to cover the scheme nor does it intend to allow free rail travel. There is no evidence of any in-depth research being carried out into the effects of free concessionary travel.

4. Report in Examination in Public of the draft Regional Spatial Strategy by Chris Dale

Four days were spent at Wigan Pier in November. The inspector agreed that public transport links need to be built into any significant planning schemes. The sessions in January were devoted to regional transport strategies. The discussion tended to be concentrated on road provision. Chris and his colleagues pressed the need for public transport to be given a higher profile in the strategy. It was agreed that airports links should not be provided as a means of making airports destinations in their own right, e.g. people using them as shopping centres, but it was agreed that Manchester Airport is a special cases as it used as a local hub for the people of Wythenshaw. The chairman expressed thanks to Paul Fawcett and Chris Dale for representing TWNW.

07/1/7F MEMBERS' ISSUES

1. **Ticket Machines** John Owen referred to a report by Soroptimists International on the subject of the use of railway ticket machines. It noted that there is still widespread passenger reluctance to use machines in certain parts of the country. They would stand unused even though there was a queue at the ticket office. Many machines failed to offer the whole range of tickets, often penalising users by not issuing the cheapest ticket for the chosen journey. The whole report is available on the TWNW web site.
2. **Overcrowding on trains services in the North West** Tony Fawthrop referred to the serious overcrowding on certain routes, notably in the Manchester area but additionally in other parts of the NW. He was aware that there is no provision in the franchise agreement for Northern to invest in additional stock. There has been no significant rolling stock increase in Greater Manchester compared with what has happened in West Yorkshire. It was noted that the DfT has clawed back most of the revenue which has accrued from the increase in passengers in the Northern franchise operation. It is believed that money set aside for additional rolling stock by GMPTE will now have to be used to pay bus operators as a result of the recent inspector's ruling regarding reimbursement for concessionary travel.
3. **Removal of bus services** Tony Garrett expressed concern about rumoured plans to remove bus services when fewer than a specific number of passengers is normally carried or the fare income is below a specific level. This, if put into effect, would remove many evening services and those serving deeply rural areas.

Prior to the close of the meeting John Moorhouse expressed thanks to Brendan O'Friel for his time as chairman of TWNW. Brendan's strengths have been timing, good humour and encouragement, all of which have created a well run series of meetings over the last few years. He was given the best wishes of the members present for his retirement on the Isle of Man, where he intends to foster passenger representation.

07/1/8F NEXT MEETING To be held on Saturday 9th June 2007 in Preston.

PRESENT

Adams	Chris	CPT
Agate	Charles	
Backhouse	Jonathon	Backhouse Jones, Solicitors
Barker	Mark	Northern Rail
Barnett	C	Bus Users UK
Barton	Roger	Goyt Valley Rail Users Group
Brent	P	NTA
Briggs	Janet	North Cheshire RUG
Burns	Lillian	NW TAR (CPRE)
Butterworth	David	Travelwatch NW
Conway	Malcolm	Lakes Line Action Group
Coutts	Caroline	CASPA
Crossley	Preva	Hindley Rail Users Group
Cuff	Janet	GMTC
Dale	Chris	BUUK
Dawson	Susan	TravelWatch Midlands West
Dunne	Tommy	Merseytravel
Edwards	Phil	NCRUG
Evans	David	BAFRUA
Fawcett	Paul	Travelwatch NW
Fawthrop	Tony	Greater Manchester Transport Campaign
Garrett	Tony	Wirral Transport User Assoc
Garvey	Peter	Greater Manchester Transport Campaign
Grange	Bert	Cheshire County Council
Grey	Brian	Railfuture
Guiver	Jo	University of Central Lancashire
Holmes	Chris	
Jarvis	Chris	Institute of Transport Administration
Kennington	Colin	Cheshire County Council & CILT
Knowles	Denis	Liverpool JL Airport
Lambden	Mike	National Express
Lamkin	Peter	WBRU Assoc
Leyland	Steve	Virgin West Coast
Lunt	Tom	
Macfarlane	Andrew	Mid Cheshire RUA
Moore	Filipina	GMCVC
Moorhouse	John	Travelwatch NW
Murray	John	Rochdale Transport Partnership
Oakes	C	Region 5 NTA
O'Friel	Brendan	Travelwatch NW
Owen	John	Travelwatch NW
Partington	Geoff	Ramblers Association
Pennyfather	Keith	Travelwatch NW
Pettener	Alan	ECLRUG
Price	Graham	NC RUG
Richardson	Malcolm	BAFRUA
Robinson	Martin	Arriva Trains Wales
Robinson	Peter	Travelwatch NW
Rollins	Richard	LASRUG
Ross	Michael	Cheshire County Council
Swallow	Ken	CILT (UK)
Thomas	John	WSS (Merseyside Branch)
Tripp	Roger	GMPTE
Warner	John	Kendal Bus Users
Watson	Ian	Travelwatch NW
Worthington	Neil	Peter Brett Associates
Wrigley	Michael	STORM
Yarwood	Mike	CASPA

APOLOGIES

Allan	Bruce	Blackpool Borough Council
Antrobus	Emma	NW Rail Campaign
Bell	Beverley	North West Traffic Commissioner
Bell	Peter	NW Bus Commission
Clarke	Clarissa	Access for All Ltd
Clarke	David	CPRE Transport Campaign Group
Colley	Peter	Kendal & District Bus Users' Group (et al)
Davies	Martyn	Merseytravel
Davies	Peter	Railfuture, Yorkshire
Dawson	Peter	STORM
Edwards	Eoan	Friends of Eccles Station
Green	Leonard	Confederation of Passenger Transport UK
Johnson	Brian	Virgin Trains
Johnston	Peter	Transpennine Rail Group
Kelly	David	Ramblers Association
Kelly	Peter	Merseytravel
Koring	Dave	Crewe & Shrewsbury Passengers Association
Lappin	Jo	Government Office North West
Miller	David	MCRUA
Mitchell	John	Wirral Transport Users Association
Oakes	Bill	CILT
Oakes	Russell	CILT
Pearse	Steve	Liverpool Chamber of Commerce
Potts	Tony	Copeland RUG
Scoles	Alan	CPT
Threlfall	John	Capita Symonds Ltd
Tonks	Phil	Bus Users UK
Trezise	Peter	Central Trains
Warburton	Julie	Passenger Focus
Warhurst	Russell	University College, Chester
Young	Tony	STORM

TravelWatch NorthWest

Supported by:

*NorthWest Regional Development Agency; North West Regional Assembly; Merseytravel;
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