

## **CONFERENCE REPORT**

**Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> February 2009  
GUILD HALL, PRESTON**

*Conference kindly sponsored by Stagecoach North West*

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

The Chairman, Chris Dale welcomed delegates to Preston and thanked the sponsors, Stagecoach North West.

### **2. Prospects for Investment in Rail in NW England:**

***Roger Jones, Campaign Director, North West Rail Investment Campaign.***

Roger gave an overview of the present political situation. Within the NW region there are only 10 Conservative and 6 Liberal Democrat MPs, the rest (60+) being Labour. Therefore lobbying in advance of the next election can be very specific. Anyone who cares about the railways must embark on a process of lobbying MPs as rail investment could easily be cut in the present climate. He offered to host a meeting about the principles of lobbying.

Roger identified a number of major issues regarding rail provision in the NW:

- There is a need for much better rolling stock. "It is the worst in the country." Overcrowding must be addressed at the same time.
- The Manchester Rail Hub capacity issues need to be addressed urgently as its problems affect the whole of the NW region. The Northern Way and Network Rail studies into possible ways of improving the situation will be available in the next six months. However, there is no additional NR funding available until 2014. This issue of funding will demand increased lobbying to stress the urgency. The issue needs to be included in party manifestos and raised at party conferences.
- Does the Conservative Party really believe in High Speed Rail? Although stated publically there may not be a genuine commitment. HS rail needs to be supported in the North West.
- Why are we still talking about electrification? Local schemes should have been completed years ago, but at least the idea of expanding electrification is now more popular.
- Many stations need to be refurbished as some are in an appalling state. The particular condition of Manchester Victoria station was mentioned.

- There needs to be a more determined approach towards light rail to avoid it being 'squeezed out' for financial reasons. A specific pot of money needs to be allocated rather than adopting a piece-meal approach.

**A questions and discussion period addressed the following issues:**

- There is considerable uncertainty about the specific details of the new trains order. Is the NW getting its fair share? Trains have been 'stolen' from N Wales routes into Manchester, resulting in overcrowding.
- MPs must be lobbied face-to-face, as they have many other interests/responsibilities and most do not consider transport to be important.
- The tram-train issue is a 'murky area' with no clearly defined outcomes. Introduction on the Chester-Northwich-Altrincham link into Manchester would have been ideal.
- MPs' attitude towards tram-trains tends to concentrate on the idea of saving money.
- The congestion charge vote result was not a surprise. Those who believe there will be TIF money in any case are ill-informed. In short – no result, no TIF. In future any transport money must be bid for in the normal way, but there may be a route through the Manchester Hub requirements.
- It was noted that MPs tend to be interested only in high profile developments, rather than local developments which improve the conditions for local passengers.
- The contrast was made between the condition of Merseytravel stations and those in the GMPTE area. Roger commented that GMPTE had been reluctant to invest in its area's stations, as they are owned by Network Rail, but this policy has now changed.

**3. The Future of Local Bus Services in Preston:**

***Chris Bowles, Managing Director, Stagecoach North West.***

The sale of Preston Bus to Stagecoach was completed on 23 January 2009. At the end of one era there is now the beginning of another, with many challenges:

- There is a need to take stock but, at the same time, ensure service stability.
- The aim is to run the best, most efficient, bus service for the people of Preston.
- Preston Bus had not been profitable so change is necessary.
- New fares (benefitting around 66% of users) have been introduced. There had been many inconsistencies.
- The Preston Bus fleet will be re-painted.
- The network will be changed to optimize routes to ensure sustainability.
- There is a need to maximise the benefit of additional services.
- Larger capacity buses will be introduced where appropriate.
- There will be no 'dumping' of routes for the local authority to pick up.
- More late night services will be introduced.
- There will be investment in infrastructure, e.g. depot services and new accessible double deck buses.
- Smartcard capability will be extended to the Preston Bus fleet.

- The real-time system will be maintained and extended.
- Change will now be given on all buses.
- The biggest challenge is that of running reliable bus services, given the ever increasing congestion in certain areas. The target is 95% of services running within 5 minutes of scheduled time. The current measure is around 90%. The Orbit service is popular (and copied by other operators) but its reliability is constrained by the road network.
- The LCC attitude to public transport was applauded.
- The 'iconic' bus station is due for demolition in 2010/11, with a replacement being built nearby.
- Concern expressed that the recession will prove to be an obstacle to progress. There are currently signs of flattening demand. Income is reducing but costs set by suppliers (materials, fuel, insurance, energy, etc) remain the same or have risen.

**A questions and discussion period addressed the following issues:**

- A very respectable fleet has been inherited from Preston Bus.
- The new double deck buses will be introduced on the Preston – Liverpool route.
- School bus and contract work will continue under the present agreements.
- Special brands (e.g. Goldline) may be considered at an appropriate time. There are no plans to introduce lower quality Magic Bus style operations.
- On a wider issue, the problem of missed connections at Penrith station between trains and the Keswick/Workington bus. Waiting time is restricted by the regulator. Operational problems would be eased by an improvement in punctuality and the introduction of a clockface timetable. It is difficult for the bus driver to determine whether the connecting train is running to time.

**4. Forward or Reverse Gear? Trends in National Transport Policy:  
*Stephen Joseph, Executive Director, Campaign for Better Transport.***

Stephen started his presentation by emphasising that he would concentrate on developments/problems at the national level rather than specifically in the NW. The government has set out five goals to achieve a Sustainable Transport System:

- supporting national economic growth;
- tackling climate change;
- contributing to better health, safety and security;
- promoting quality of opportunity;
- improving quality of life and the natural environment.

The policy must make progress against all the five goals and not give priority to one or two.

The National Transport Strategy process follows these stages:

- 'Delivering a Sustainable Transport System' consultation is in progress;
- A White Paper will be produced in March followed by a Carbon Reduction Strategy in June;

- There will be an Option generation study involving 14 corridors (one of which is London-West Midlands-NW) to look at all possible options, with the emphasis on modal neutrality.
- In 2012 there will be a further White Paper, setting out spending in 2014+ on all modes.
- National Policy Statements will be produced for ports, aviation and 'national networks' under the Planning Act.
- Regions will advise National Government on priorities within their Regional Funding Allocations.

Some good analytical work has already been done by government regarding carbon emissions for various journeys. The results show that carbon comes primarily from longer trips, many of which are taken by single car drivers.

Specifically regarding rail, the good news is that funding is guaranteed until 2014 (CP4), there is now a firm intention to proceed with electrification schemes and politicians compete among themselves to support high speed rail either as an alternative to air travel or to complement it.

The Local Transport Act will allow Voluntary Partnerships to make co-operation among bus operators easier and there will be Statutory Partnerships to permit 'tendered network zones' and quality contracts. Kick-start funding will be available for certain bus projects and Passenger Focus will act as the bus watchdog.

Therefore the good news ('looking forwards') is that local councils will have greater opportunity to improve bus service provision, some rail improvements and new trains will happen and motorway widening has been replaced by hard shoulder running (which will result in slower but more predictable journey times).

The less good news (the 'looking backwards' bit) includes:

- fiscal stimulus (to counteract the recession) is bypassing rail and local transport;
- regional funding advice in the NW is prioritising major roads;
- rail and bus fares are rising above inflation year-on-year.
- economic appraisal discriminates against public transport;
- land use planning put new development around roads and car parking rather than public transport;
- it is proving impossible to build electric local transport systems, e.g. trams, ultra-light rail, trolleybuses;
- carbon reduction is focussing on technology rather than modal shift;
- the principle of local road charging is dead after the Manchester vote.

Stephen deduced therefore that, for the reasons stated above, the government will not deliver on its five goals. There is a much greater need for meaningful planning frameworks, appraisal reform, a clear identification of all the available options, a need to work with those who generate travel, and to get the prices right (to force modal shift). Above all there must be secure funding for local public transport networks.

The improved planning frameworks must:

- safeguard alignments/sites for new/re-opened railway lines;
- put new development where it is most accessible by public transport;
- new developments must incorporate travel plans;
- create new transport authorities to bring together transport, planning and related strategies;
- local authorities must be required to contribute towards reducing carbon emissions;
- there must be transport audits done before it is decided to close post offices, build polyclinics, site new schools, etc.

Appraisal reform must remove tax losses from cost/benefit analyses, it must value reliability rather than small time savings, with carbon reduction being absolute rather than being traded off against time savings.

The identification of options must examine origins and destinations more closely, look at the need to reduce travel, address the need for a step-change in transport provision (rather than just incremental improvements). There must be an examination of whole scenarios rather than permitting past trends to continue.

Working with those who generate travel will require the formulation of travel plans for all groups who could use public transport, encourage car clubs and improve the facilities for personal journey planning.

Getting prices right will involve re-balancing the disparity between reducing air and car costs and increasing public transport fares. Research has shown that by reducing fares by 20% will increase bus travel by 13% and rail travel by 17% by 2015. This would result in a significant reduction in carbon emissions. A start could be made by taxing domestic air travel fuel to fund RPI -1% on rail fares.

Funding should cover revenue needs as well as capital outlay and come from other sources, such as business rates, property taxes and parking charges.

Transport needs to be joined up to regeneration, employment and access to jobs/training, air quality, climate change and overall quality of life, health (including physical activity and access to health) and personal security and safety.

In conclusion Stephen noted that there are some positive trends in national policy but there are many problems with the current approaches. Climate change and oil depletion will require less car dependence. The benefits of public transport must be properly valued. Travel behaviour can be influenced by smarter choice methods. No amount of further road building and extra car parking spaces can cater for the demand.

#### **Question and discussion period addressed the following issues:**

In response to questions and observations, Stephen made the following points:

- Optimism bias (whereby project costs are inflated, resulting in a low benefit/cost ratio for a scheme) is ignored for road schemes but not for rail or trams schemes.
- The recent rail fares hike results from the government's requirement that 75% of rail funding will be borne by the passenger, rather than 50% as at present. There has been no overall cost/benefit analysis resulting from these increased fare levels.
- The protection of rail alignments must be part of a national strategy.
- There is a need for a national smartcard system to allow seamless travel. It works in other parts of Europe so it should be able to work in UK.
- There have been no formal studies into the possible effect of the use of the seniors' concessionary bus travel scheme upon car use. However there is plenty of anecdotal evidence that there has been a reduction.

##### **5. Single Integrated Regional Strategy (Update):**

***Lillian Burns, Director TWNW & Convenor, NW Transport Activists Roundtable.***

The purpose of Lillian's presentation was to explain where planning policy is going and how it will affect transport at all levels. She declared "Planning is going to hell in a basket. It has been heading that way for the last few years."

The traditional UK planning system has, until recently, been the envy of the world. The rules and regulations had been carefully refined and they worked. However, the enquiry into Terminal Five at Heathrow took an excessive amount of time and this prompted the government to loosen and speed up the whole planning system.

Four years ago the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act did away with Local Plans which have been replaced by Local Development Frameworks. These comprise many different Local Development Documents, each of which has to be consulted upon. At the centre are Core Strategies, less specific than the old Local Plans. There is now less opportunity for public intervention in that it is now necessary to prove that the whole plan (rather than elements of it) is unsound before there can be any debate about policy wording. This level of proof will be very difficult to achieve. More recently planning changes have resulted in a relaxation of the rules such that some types of major extensions to domestic dwelling plots (for instance) no longer need planning approval. The appearance of local communities is bound to change as a result.

The latest legislation allows a fast-tracking of major infrastructure projects and removes any opportunity for the average citizen to intervene. This process will be overseen by the Infrastructure Planning Commission whose leadership is, as yet, unknown. The Commission will oversee the planning of developments of national significance such as power stations, large reservoirs, waste plants, motorways, ports and airports. The new Heathrow runway will be assessed in this way, with no democratic accountability. Once a decision has been made there will be no public enquiry. The only appeal will be to the Secretary of State, in whose name the commissioners will serve.

Previously, at a regional level, we had RPGs which became RSSs, both the responsibility of RAs. Additionally there were RESs, the responsibility of the RDAs. We have now been subjected to a 'Sub-national Review' with the result that Regional Assemblies have been cut down to entities known as Leaders' Forums. Ours is called 4NW. The Leaders' Forums and the Development Agencies are to be jointly responsible for one regional strategy, originally to be known as the Single Integrated Regional Strategy (SIRS), then it became the Integrated Regional Strategy (IRS) and is now called the Regional Strategy. A simple name to describe a not-so-simple process which will be overseen by a Select Committee of regional MPs.

The new Integrated Transport Authorities are already engaged in the development of the strategy, assisted by a 50-strong Regional Strategy Advisory Group, comprising a wide range of stakeholders. The Regional Strategy will identify the region's priorities for action, which will be enshrined in law. It will set the overarching policies for Local development Documents and the Local Transport Plans. There will be opportunities for interaction by members of the public during the development process, ranging from responses to set questions to attendance at consultation events. More information can be found at [www.4nw.org.uk](http://www.4nw.org.uk). Comments can additionally be fed in via TravelWatch NorthWest or the North West Transport Roundtable.

Lillian expressed the hope that she had not put people off getting involved in the planning process. "Give that Hell's Basket a good shake and see if we can get some things we want to fall out of it."

## 6. Open Forum

A number of issues notified for the Open Forum had been effectively covered in the foregoing items and discussion. Others that were not were as follows:

- It is regrettable that continuing anti-competition restraint prevent open access services being introduced on the West Coast routes.
- There is increasing overcrowding on many of the FTPE Manchester Airport–Scotland services, with no immediate likelihood of lengthened trains.
- It is not clear when the promised new trains will appear across the NW.
- There is limited opportunity for smooth connections between Workington–Carlisle and Carlisle–Tyneside services at Carlisle. It is reported to be a Northern Rail aspiration to improve route interchange.
- There is no stakeholder involvement in the Regional Funding Allocation. The NW budget is currently overrunning by 35%, involving mainly road schemes which are rapidly increasing in cost.
- New legislation should allow community bus services (e.g. run by community interest companies) to employ paid drivers rather than volunteers.
- The Penrith-Workington bus service is to receive new models but problems with luggage space and access will still persist.

- It was alleged that transport strategy mainly relates to city regions and is thus urban-centric. The Eddington Report does not mention rural problems, nor are they acknowledged by the DfT.

## 7. Next Conference

The next TravelWatch Conference will take place in Liverpool on Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> June 2009 (sponsored by Merseytravel) and will feature a presentation by Professor David Begg.

## Attendance

Name	Organisation
<i>AT Garrett</i>	<i>Wirral Transport Users Assoc</i>
<i>Adrian Dunning</i>	<i>NW Transport Activists Round Table</i>
<i>Aidan Turner-Bishop</i>	<i>Campaign for Better Transport Lancs</i>
<i>Alan Pettener</i>	<i>East Cheshire Line RUG</i>
<i>Allan McLean</i>	<i>Virgin Trains</i>
<i>Bill Harrop</i>	<i>Transport Pool</i>
<i>Colin Barnett</i>	<i>Bus Users UK</i>
<i>Chris Dale</i>	<i>TWNW</i>
<i>Chris Anslow</i>	<i>Lancs CC</i>
<i>CA Potts</i>	<i>Copeland RUG</i>
<i>Cedric Green</i>	<i>North Cheshire RUG</i>
<i>Chris Bowles</i>	<i>Stagecoach North West</i>
<i>Chris Holmes</i>	<i>GMPTE</i>
<i>David Butterworth</i>	<i>TWNW</i>
<i>Dave Koring</i>	<i>Crewe &amp; Shrewsbury Passrs Assoc</i>
<i>David Davenport</i>	<i>Merseytravel</i>
<i>Darren Axe</i>	
<i>Dave Wetzel</i>	
<i>David Burton</i>	<i>SELRAP</i>
<i>David Evans</i>	<i>Blackpool &amp; Fylde RUA</i>
<i>Dennis Harrison</i>	<i>Wirral Transport Users Assoc</i>
<i>Emma Antrobus</i>	<i>NW Rail Campaign</i>
<i>Fred Consterdine</i>	<i>Crewe &amp; Shrewsbury Passrs Assoc</i>
<i>Geoff Kerr</i>	
<i>Geoff Partington</i>	
<i>Iain Aitchison</i>	<i>Lancs CC</i>
<i>Ian Watson</i>	
<i>John Moorhouse</i>	<i>TWNW</i>
<i>John Owen</i>	<i>TWNW</i>
<i>John Warner</i>	
<i>Janet Briggs</i>	<i>North Cheshire RUG</i>
<i>Janet Cuff</i>	<i>Ramblers Assoc</i>
<i>Jenny O'Connor</i>	<i>Government Office NW</i>
<i>Joe Lynch</i>	<i>TWSW</i>
<i>John Aaron</i>	
<i>John Hart</i>	<i>TWNW</i>

<i>John Hobbs</i>	<i>North Cheshire RUG</i>
<i>John Murray</i>	<i>Rochdale Transport Partnership</i>
<i>John Ryan</i>	<i>Wirral TUA</i>
<i>Keith Pennyfather</i>	<i>Macclesfield PTLC</i>
<i>Ken McKelvie</i>	<i>Ramblers Assoc</i>
<i>Ken Swallow</i>	<i>CILT</i>
<i>Leonard Green</i>	
<i>Lillian Burns</i>	<i>NW TAR</i>
<i>Malcolm Richardson</i>	<i>BAFRUA</i>
<i>Mike Lambden</i>	<i>National Express</i>
<i>Mike Perkins</i>	<i>Ormskirk Southport Preston Travellers Assoc</i>
<i>Mike Wrigley</i>	<i>STORM</i>
<i>Paul Fawcett</i>	<i>TWNW</i>
<i>Peter Colley</i>	<i>Kendal &amp; District Bus Users</i>
<i>Peter Davison</i>	<i>GMPTA</i>
<i>Peter Garvey</i>	<i>GM Transport Campaign</i>
<i>Peter Johnston</i>	
<i>Peter Lamkin</i>	<i>Wrexham Birkenhead RUA</i>
<i>Peter Robinson</i>	<i>TWNW</i>
<i>Phillipa Sudlow</i>	<i>Confederation for Passenger Transport</i>
<i>Preva Crossley</i>	<i>Friends of Hindley</i>
<i>Richard Chapman</i>	<i>Rochdale Transport Group</i>
<i>Robert Talbot</i>	<i>Lakes Line RUG</i>
<i>Roger Barton</i>	<i>Goyt Valley RUA</i>
<i>Roger Jones</i>	<i>North West Rail Campaign</i>
<i>Stephen Joseph</i>	<i>Campaign for Better Transport</i>
<i>Sue Dawson</i>	<i>TWMW</i>
<i>Tom Lunt</i>	
<i>Tony Fawthrop</i>	<i>GM Transport Campaign</i>