

CONFERENCE REPORT

Wednesday 10th June 2009
Offices of Merseytravel, Liverpool
Conference kindly sponsored by Merseytravel

1. Welcome and Introduction

The Chairman, Chris Dale welcomed delegates to Liverpool and thanked the sponsors and host, Merseytravel, for its kind support. He went on to inform delegates of the activities and work of TravelWatch North West since the last conference. A number of consultations had been, or were in the process of being, responded to. These included:

- Ø Passenger Focus - Air travel and airport service passenger representation
- Ø Manchester Metrolink – exemptions from railways acts
- Ø Private Hire Vehicles providing local services
- Ø RS 2010
- Ø OFT Bus Market Survey
- Ø West Coast Main Line RUS
- Ø Electrification of rail routes

Also a report on the availability of bus fares information would shortly be published.

He also reported that a meeting had taken place with Greater Manchester Integrated Transport Authority to seek an improved working relationship.

2. Transport Developments in Merseyside

Alan Stilwell, Director of Operations, Merseytravel.

Alan began his presentation by describing the role and responsibilities of Merseytravel which cover the 2 Mersey tunnels, Mersey Ferries, Merseyrail and bus services. here

He went on to discuss the Local Transport Plan. Its **Rail Strategy** covers monitoring service performance, which includes making the best use of the network, optimising use of available rolling stock to minimize overcrowding. Currently 52 of the 59 available train units are regularly deployed. There is a need to improve punctuality on the City Line and procure additional rolling stock to address overcrowding

issues. Northern rail services had witnessed a 10% increase in passengers in recent years.

Expansion of the network includes aspirations to serve the Bidston – Wrexham line by electrified services but the cost of £207 million is a challenge and a reduction of this figure is being sought. Liverpool Central requires improvement to address capacity issues and passenger experiences to cover the next 15 – 20 years. The Olive Mount chord and Bootle branch line developments to allow better access for freight traffic have been achieved.

The **Bus Strategy** features an Integrated Corridor Management scheme to identify an optimum service network of corridor routes and apply appropriate enforcement practices (Bus lanes). Accessibility continues to be a challenge as does integration of services and ever changing information requirements. Statutory Quality Partnerships are sought in preference to Quality Contracts as they provide for collective decision making rather than enforcement. An officer led Bus Board, involving representatives from all partners, has been created to deliver the strategy.

Liverpool South Parkway continues to develop as the gateway to John Lennon Airport and is also bringing economic development opportunities to the Speke and Garston areas. Footfall and ticket sales are exceeding targets and park and ride at the site is well established.

A number of **Drivers of Change** that will impact on planning projects are in the air including the Transport Act 2008, LTP 3, which will not enjoy the 25% bonus next year due to changed rules, regional funding allocations which in future will be regionally, rather than centrally, managed. Add to this the prospect of a change of government before next year and the differing policies that may result, and there is a significant degree of uncertainty.

In addition to the above a number of complementary activities are in train including TravelSafe - addressing secure stations and passenger safety; TravelWise, a wide ranging marketing strategy and a public art strategy to enliven stations and passenger experiences.

A questions and discussion period addressed the following issues:

Liverpool South Parkway park and ride had become so popular that spaces were at a premium. Merseytravel is aware of this and is examining enhancements to encourage public transport access to the station and optimising availability of car park spaces.

Compliments were delivered for Merseytravel's Cycle friendly policies particularly on Northern and Wirral lines, and the excellent facilities at Woodside ferry terminal.

The prospect of Merseytram is still a plank of the policy platform but as government funding was withdrawn, alternative options were being examined.

Merseytravel is working with RoSCO's to seek possible procurement of additional rolling stock as it becomes available and will proceed if it is feasible and affordable.

The reinstatement of Halton Curve is still being pursued as a direct rail link from North Wales and North Cheshire is desirable. Studies are being carried out and, if positive, Network Rail has agreed to finance the next round of research.

3. The Northern Way and Public Transport ***John Jarvis, Transport Project Director***

The Northern way is a partnership of the 3 Regional Development Agencies in the North of England. Yorkshire Forward leads on transport issues. Its Growth Strategy of September 2004 set the direction and was validated by the Eddington Study.

The subsequent Transport Direction Strategy of 2006 underpinned the Northern Way's submission to CSR and provided an evidence based set of research to identify the northern productivity gap.

The proposals include Delivery of a Sustainable Transport system with a detailed long term study (20 – 30 years) to determine the needs of strategic transport networks and systems in the North .

A number of early wins in the life of the strategy were claimed including access to gateways and identification of strategic transport gaps in the current network. Projects completed included the Olive Mount chord in Merseyside, the 3rd platform at Manchester Airport station, Hull Docks branch line, gauge enhancements on strategic routes including the West and East coast main lines and the M6/M602 HDV lane. In addition much work has gone in to the building of a base of evidence to support funding of future projects.

The Manchester Hub has been identified as probably the major strategic gap in the North and a programme is being put together to plug this by enhancement and improvement works by 2014 or earlier if possible. Network Rail will be in the lead on this.

Growth trend forecasts predict that travel in the North will increase by, at minimum, 40% in the next decade and by 72% by 2029.

Rail strategies have been identified for Trans Pennine and North/South routes, highlighting the requirement of good connections to London and the South East. There is currently no long term strategic view and this is being addressed. High Speed rail is deemed to be an essential project as current capacity will be full in the next 10 – 20 years. This enhancement is forecast to bring £10 billion to the economy of the North and is twice as important to the North as the South. Northern way is also looking to align with Greengauge 21 proposals favouring 5 major corridors including West Coast, East Coast and Trans Pennine routes as well as Scotland.

A questions and discussion period addressed the following issues:

The opportunity by a rail link from Skipton to Colne is acknowledged but the current focus is getting the best out of the existing network. Equally schemes for station builds and enhancement and the Woodhead tunnel route would need to prove to be economically practical before any development.

Economic evidence has identified London as the pre-eminent destination particularly with its dominance of the financial sector and Heathrow.

Despite some parties not being convinced by high speed enhancements of North – South routes, preferring priorities to be East – West, it is believed that capacity issues, economic drivers and tightness of budgets will prevail over the final decisions.

No decisions have been taken about the preferred northern destinations of High Speed rail lines. There needs to be identification of likely outcomes, married with buildability and identification of potential use of freed up capacity on existing lines as a consequence of a HSL before this stage is reached although it is acknowledged that speculation is already being aired in some quarters.

4. Working with the Local Transport Act 2008 – An Operators view.

John Rimmer – Chair CPT NW Region & Operations Director – Arriva

The Act will only meet the challenge if it makes buses better. Buses, their routes and infra-structure must be an attractive proposition if they are to entice car drivers to use them as an alternative. The challenge will be about Delivery.

Quality contracts may not be a realistic option as they incubate a serious downside:

- Ø Perpetual bidding for investment
- Ø Quality is driven by available funds
- Ø Likely to be expensive
- Ø Effects on permanent staffing, careers and pension rights by constant changes
- Ø No improvements in punctuality in journey times

Quality Partnership Schemes are preferred as all players within them can concentrate on what they are good at and bring those skills to the collective table. However, Highways Authorities must recognise their responsibilities to bus users and should be part of the partnerships. In practice this is not always the case.

The Traffic Commissioner's powers within the Act should also be applied to Local Authorities who fail in their transport responsibilities. Equally positive links are being

established with Passenger Focus in its new role leading to consequential improvements to passenger experiences and quality issues.

The Competition Act will be welcomed as long as it looks at Service Timings, Frequencies, Cooperation between operators and the ability of local authorities to ascertain that schemes are in the local interest.

A questions and discussion period addressed the following issues:

The Act does not have any influence over the quality of information at bus stops but this is an example where Quality Partnerships can be influential in finding fast solutions.

New schemes will address integration of operator's services and seamless ticketing.

5. Passenger Focus and bus passengers

David Sidebottom, Passenger /Link Manager, Passenger Focus

David began by referring to the recent announcement that Passenger Focus was to be considered to have its remit expanded to cover air passengers. He clarified that this was currently the subject of a consultation process and would likely be a long term aspiration. Whilst PF welcomed the proposal it had not campaigned for it and resources to match the need will be imperative.

PF had recently launched its Strategy for Achievement 2009 – 2012. In Bus representation it had highlighted the following points:

- Ø Research
 - Passenger satisfaction and priorities
 - Benchmarking of services
 - Mystery traveller work embracing DfT pilots
 - National/Local themed work

This will result in::

- Ø Building links with passengers
- Ø Working with operators and stakeholders
- Ø Influencing policy and practice
- Ø Seeking out journey improvements

The bus and coach responsibility of PF launched on 22nd April 2009 so is still in its early days. However current work streams are:

- Ø Research – e.g concessionary bus fares, complaint handling arrangements
- Ø Established Pilot areas – SE, SW, W Midlands.
- Ø Developing policy – Traffic Commissioner; EC Passenger rights
- Ø Communicating with passengers and stakeholders

The year ahead will involve further consultation led by DfT to include Powers, Passenger Appeals role, responsibilities for tram passengers. Statutory powers to be established in April 2010.

In the meantime PF will ensure its promises on rail responsibilities will be delivered and will persevere with its communications role.

A questions and discussion period addressed the following issues:

PF is not aware of any further expansion of its remit to cover ferry services.

PF will continue to be an England only operation but liaison and networking with Scotland and Wales will continue for cross boundary issues.

PF expects that its statutory powers will be equivalent to its current rail powers. It needs to develop good relationships throughout the bus sector however.

PF does not inform operators when and where mystery shoppers are active other than the period of operation of surveys.

PF expects its remit to be for scheduled services only. The consultation will refer to excursions, private hire and tours but the DfT will rule on the final powers.

On rail issues the 10 minute punctuality window was questioned. PF agrees that this is too large a period and is taking it up with Network Rail.

6. Administration of Bus Travel Concessions

Paul Fawcett, TravelWatch North West

The DfT is consulting on the scheme and currently points to 4 possible options for its future administration and funding viz:

- Ø Status Quo – 263 TCA's
- Ø Top tier - Shire County Councils - (DfT preference)
- Ø Regions - will require primary legislation
- Ø National - English TCA

Funding is not ring fenced and is determined by demographic and economic factors. A top up grant is made for special circumstances – e.g. tourism, seasonality.

Top tier LTA's can pool grants for consistencies within their constituent areas.

Reimbursements to operators will be determined by “follow on” consultation. This will be based on varying factors and the present inordinate number of appeals in process will help to influence this. Reimbursement to be based on factors such as “revenue foregone”, additional costs and adjustments for estimated levels of “generated traffic

DfT's questions seek to optimise the level of administration and consider whether management needs to be at the same level. Current main problems that have emerged are a high level of appeals, inconsistency of data from area to area, cross boundary disputes, and the funding winners/losers arguments of local authorities.

There is potential for a new funding arrangement in 2012 which could adjust age qualification. Park and ride and unscheduled tourist services are now discretionary.

The consultation ends on 21 July 2009.

7. Open Forum

TravelWatch will follow up the issue of accessibility at Merseyrail stations.

There is concern in the bus industry and local authorities when larger bus operators take over services from smaller ones and then make major changes. The Competition Commission is currently hearing cases from Preston and Eastbourne on this issue.

Rail replacement bus services still continue in the West Coast main line in Cumbria at certain times of the year despite Network Rail's current promotional campaign.

Northern Rail is in discussion with DfT to seek to strengthen services using cascaded stock from the Oldham loop line after it becomes a Metrolink operation. STORM believes that all cascaded stock should be retained to cover train services on the Calder valley route into Manchester.

Passenger Focus is unable to represent local passenger interest and issues and TravelWatch will seek better liaison with operators within the confines of its resources, in particular the attendance of operators at conferences.

A business case will need to be made if weekend only leisure bus services into the Peak District from Manchester are to be expanded to mid week.

8. Future Events

Joint TravelWatch/Passenger Focus Rural Transport Conference – Thursday 10th September , Carnforth

Next regular Conference – Thursday 8th October, Mechanics Centre Manchester

Attendance

Name	Organisation
<i>AT Garrett</i>	<i>Wirral Transport Users Assoc</i>
<i>Alan Pettener</i>	
<i>Alan Stilwell</i>	<i>Merseytravel</i>
<i>Alastair Nuttall</i>	<i>Rossendale Transport Ltd</i>
<i>Andrew Dutton</i>	<i>Liverpool JL Airport</i>
<i>Andrew Macfarlane</i>	<i>GM Transport Campaign</i>
<i>Anne Williams</i>	<i>Cheshire Integrated Transport Service</i>
<i>Bill Oakes</i>	
<i>Bill Harrop</i>	<i>Transport Action Group Manchester</i>
<i>Brian Grey</i>	<i>Railfuture NW</i>
<i>Colin Barnett</i>	<i>Bus Users UK</i>
<i>Chris Dale</i>	<i>TWNW</i>
<i>Chris Laycock</i>	
<i>David Blainey</i>	<i>Merseytravel</i>
<i>Dave Koring</i>	<i>Crewe & Shrewsbury Passrs Assoc</i>
<i>David Robinson</i>	<i>CTC</i>
<i>David Sidebottom</i>	<i>Passenger Focus</i>
<i>Fred Consterdine</i>	<i>Crewe & Shrewsbury Passrs Assoc</i>
<i>Geoff Kerr</i>	
<i>Harry Boardman</i>	<i>Mid Cheshire RUA</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>Joe Hegarty</i>	<i>Blackpool Council</i>
<i>John Aaron</i>	
<i>John Jarvis</i>	<i>The Northern Way</i>
<i>John Hart</i>	<i>TWNW</i>
<i>John Murray</i>	<i>Rochdale Transport Partnership</i>
<i>John Rimmer</i>	<i>Confederation of Passenger Transport NW</i>
<i>John Ryan</i>	<i>Wirral TUA</i>
<i>John S Mitchell</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>Kerry Williamson</i>	<i>Passenger Focus</i>
<i>Leonard Green</i>	
<i>Malcolm Richardson</i>	<i>BAFRUA</i>
<i>Paul Byrne</i>	
<i>Paul Fawcett</i>	<i>TWNW</i>

<i>Peter Foster</i>	<i>Sustrans</i>
<i>Peter Johnston</i>	
<i>Peter Lamkin</i>	<i>Wrexham Birkenhead RUA</i>
<i>Peter Robinson</i>	<i>TWNW</i>
<i>Phil Edwards</i>	<i>North Cheshire RUG</i>
<i>Philip Harrison</i>	
<i>Phillipa Sudlow</i>	<i>Confederation of Passenger Transport NW</i>
<i>Richard Whitham</i>	<i>Blackpool Council</i>
<i>Robert Talbot</i>	<i>Lakes Line RUG</i>
<i>Russell Oakes</i>	
<i>Tom Lunt</i>	
<i>Tony Barker</i>	<i>Halton BC</i>