

promoting quality public transport.....

CONFERENCE REPORT

**Thursday 14th June 2012
 The Town Hall, Blackpool**

Conference kindly supported by First Trans Pennine Express and Blackpool Council

1. Welcome and Introduction

The Chairman, Chris Dale, welcomed delegates to Blackpool and thanked First TransPennine Express and Blackpool Council for their kind support. He paid tribute to Board member John Murray, who passed away earlier in the year, referring to his valued contribution to the work of TWNW and STORM. He then welcomed the opening of the Metrolink line to Oldham on the previous day and went on to describe some of the work of TravelWatch NorthWest since the last conference.

Consultation responses had been provided for:

- Competition Commissions Inquiry into Bus services (HoCTC)
- Role of the Rail Regulator (ORR)
- Devolution of Rail funding (DfT)
- Reform of the Railways 2020 (HoCTC)
- Alternative RUS (Network Rail)

In addition TWNW has participated in a number of conferences and meetings including as follows:

- Launch of Bus Passenger Survey (Passenger Focus)
- Sustainable Transport (University of Central Lancashire)
- Rail User Groups (Passenger Focus)

2. Welcome to Blackpool

Cllr. Fred Jackson, Deputy Leader of Blackpool Council and Cabinet Member for Streets and Transport

Cllr. Jackson welcomed delegates to Blackpool and the Town Hall. He referred to the recent launch of new trams that will soon operate a 10 minute service and also the Heritage Trams that will continue to operate. The high frequency bus service will soon expand after receipt of Government funding.

Future aspirations of the Borough are the expansion of the tramway to Lytham and ultimately Preston, using the rail network, and the reintroduction of through trains to London after the completion of electrification to Blackpool.

3. Public Transport Provision in Blackpool

Trevor Roberts, Managing Director, Blackpool Transport Services Ltd.

Blackpool Transport has been able to address many issues to modernise the operation of its services with the invaluable help and coordination between the company and the local authorities of the Fylde working together.

In 2000 the system had gone through a major overhaul with new routes, re-branding, higher frequencies, new fares structure, and dedicated branded vehicles to routes. Whilst this was successful in modernising the network and its operations at the time, challenges posed from 2009 of reduced financial support and difficult trading conditions had led to the need for a strategic review. Issues that had to be countered included:

- Reduction in Concessionary Travel reimbursement
- Reduction in Tramway revenues due to restrictions in network operation
- Economic downturn
- Tough fuel hedging deal signed at a bad time
- Significant pay award
- Reduced passenger numbers
- Income and cost pressures

These issues dictated the need for another modernisation programme and so a Strategic Review was undertaken to consider:

- Refreshment of network
- Usage Review
- Revised Branding – change to single corporate livery
- Reduction on fleet size
- Replacement of non-DDA compliant vehicles
- New uniform image
- Expand concessionary fares to trams
- Procurement of replacement vehicles
- Review of fare range

The changing usage pattern of the network dictated the need to look at it again and cut wastage. The branded routes, whilst popular, had resulted in limitations in alternative use of vehicles and by adopting a single corporate livery, a reduction in the fleet of 25 had been achieved. The fleet was modernised by the procurement of vehicles in a variety of value for money transactions and the fares range that had become unwieldy and disjointed was reduced.

As part of the review an examination was taken of the major influencing factors that affected business and in doing so, partnerships with local

authorities, academic, local resident community and tourism groups were strengthened. It was accepted that the weather had a major influence in reliability and business performance and so plans needed flexibility to cope. Lancs. CC had pulled out of the provision of timetable information at bus stops due to financial constraints and so the operators are now working in partnership to overcome the issue. Provision and maintenance of bus shelters has passed to Blackpool Council which retains all advertising revenue. The website will soon offer online booking and the telephone answering service has been upgraded to provide a more modern approach. The results had turned annual losses in each of recent years into a small profit in 2011.

The future poses a number challenges to be countered. These include financial performance affected by the BSOG, fuel duty increase and the concessionary fare reimbursement. As personal travel costs increase, the offer to Blackpool residents to attract new business is an opportunity to be considered. Previously the trams had attracted low local usage, but the new trams have reversed this trend and are operating above targets.

The new tramway is now a modern LRT system but has also brought its challenges. It has entered a new regulatory regime and, as it requires new driving techniques, it has required extensive new staffing skills to be introduced. A new recruitment drive has taken place, as many drivers had left, and a re-training regime has been put in place. Heritage trams will still operate during holiday periods and at weekends but will be limited stop and have a premium fare level. A number of issues still need to be overcome including speed checking, event operation, the Metropole access traffic management, Fleetwood operations, sand on lines and service levels to meet demand, but a learning curve is in place as the operations progress through their first year.

In discussion it was revealed that the number of tram stops had been reduced from 61 to 37 to offer a more efficient service and trams from the present fleet were being modified as the stops have a small platform. Plus Bus tickets are accepted between St. Anne's Square and Thornton Gate and the system is equipped to accept Smartcards when they are introduced.

4. Blackpool & Fleetwood Tramway Upgrade ***Phil Nixon, Senior Project Manager, Blackpool Council***

The tramway had opened in 1885 and now carries 4 million passengers annually on its 11.5 mile route, 85% of which travel in the peak holiday season.

It had been known for some time that the whole system required major upgrade and in 2009 emergency work had taken place costing £11.8 million. Also, the fleet would not be compliant with legislation by 2019. The new tramway has cost £100+ million, £65 million of which was provided by the Dept for Transport, the remainder being provided by Blackpool Council, Lancs. CC and a small grant of £825,000 from the EC Intereg programme.

The work was divided into 3 elements:

Track system and highway alterations. Work began in 2009. Trams now take priority at highway junctions. New platforms incorporating shelters were built at 37 stops. 44 km of overhead cable was replaced, 250 new traction poles were erected, 5 km of concrete fencing was replaced and new substations were built to augment current provision.

New vehicles. 16 new trams have been procured and entered service in 2012. They will provide a 10 minute service. Each carries 74 passengers. 10 of the previous fleet have been modified to enable them to operate on the system and some “heritage” trams have been enabled to operate to limited stops at peak holiday times.

Depots. Rigby Road was deemed dated and unsuitable for the new trams so a new depot was completed at Starr Gate in 2011.

Future aspirations include a spur to Blackpool North station, and an extension to Blackpool airport, as well as other destinations, but these will all be resource dependent.

In discussion the issue of sand problems was raised and it was emphasised that new vehicle specifications had covered this, but it remained a track issue, particularly during adverse weather, however the new sea wall will help to minimise the problem. Dialogue also continues with stakeholders in Fleetwood over changed routings.

5. New Trains for TransPennine

Kathryn O'Brien, Head of Franchise Development and David Langton, Timetable Strategy Manager

The current TPE franchise runs from 2004 to 2014. The company has 1000+ employees, 60 trains and 75,000 customers per day. Since the start of the franchise passenger numbers have grown 68% to 26 million per year. The service between Manchester Airport and Scotland has seen an increase of 135%. 60% of passengers are travelling for leisure purposes and these yield 72% of revenue. Business and commuter passengers account for 13% and 27% respectively. Whilst it is a success story it has led to serious overcrowding on some routes which is now regarded as the No.1 problem.

In December 2013 the first of a 2 stage timetable change will take place in line with the electrification programme for the north. A fleet of 10 new 110 mph, 4 car 350 class electric trains will be introduced into the timetable to operate the Scottish services via the Chat Moss line instead of the Bolton corridor. The trains are being tailor made for the service and will provide an additional toilet, more luggage space and 35 additional seats. The Barrow and Windermere branches are not included in the electrification programme so challenges have emerged to enable provision of through trains to and from Manchester. Work progresses in liaison with line users and it is hoped to preserve most peak time through services. Wigan will benefit from an

intensified non stop service to/from Manchester. Many weekend services will run as 8 car trains supplemented by 185 diesels on other services.

The May 2014 timetable will feature 15 trains per day each way between Manchester and Scotland. An extra service operating from Liverpool to Manchester Victoria in 32 minutes, and onwards to Leeds and Newcastle will increase the cross Pennine route to 5 trains per hour and complete its end to end journey in less than 3 hours.

Future service enhancements by virtue of electrification will occur from 2016 with Blackpool electrification (Spring 2016), Bolton corridor (Dec. 2016), Ordsall Curve (Dec 2016), Victoria – Stalybridge electrification (Dec. 2016) and Leeds/York potentially by 2020.

Line speed improvements on the Hope Valley and Calder Valley routes will also bring improvements to timetables. In addition as part of the Northern Hub stage 2, Platforms 15 and 16 at Manchester Piccadilly will be built.

Much of the improvement programme still requires final approval so hopefully the HLOS announcement in July will give some pointers.

Government priorities for future include:

- Longer Franchises
- Flexible Fares and Ticket procedures, including Smart ticketing
- Devolution of franchising
- Integration and Alliancing

Results are forecast to offer better outcomes for passengers with cost reductions, local control, economic growth and carbon reduction.

In discussion the issue of the loss of through services between Manchester Airport and Barrow/Windermere via the Bolton corridor was raised. Research had indicated that only 15% of revenue from these services came from passengers travelling between Cumbria and Manchester but dialogue was ongoing with stakeholders on all affected routes to seek solutions. After electrification of the Bolton corridor, Scottish services may return to that route as it is 12 miles shorter. Equally TPE is in dialogue with Northern about local frequencies on the Manchester - Leeds route. Manchester Victoria operations will be re-planned along with the station refurbishment to cater for enhanced through operations.

6. Just a Minute Session

The “Just a Minute” session is designed to give delegates the opportunity to air views on issues that affect public transport in their locality. This requires views to be presented within a 1 minute timescale and subsequent discussion to be equally disciplined. The following issues were raised:

- Removal of electronic information provision at bus stations in Lancashire – *This is part of a cost cutting regime and saves Lancs. CC £175,000 per year which can be available to support bus services.*
- Mega Bus Plus – 3 buses from Colne reduced to 1
- There should be a small charge for bus concessionary travel to prevent bus companies going under.
- Ticket checks on trains.
- Potential for Canal Network for public transport provision – *Only a leisure option but potential for more freight operations.*
- Local franchising – need single operator – *Currently in debate.*

Where representatives of companies were present they promised to take comments back. Other issues will be addressed by lobbying appropriate bodies to seek correction of anomalies.

7. Next Conference - Thursday 11th October, 2012 at Merseytravel's new offices, One Mann Island, Liverpool L3 1BP.

Attendance

Name	Organisation
Adrian Dunning	North West Transport Activists Roundtable
Aidan Turner-Bishop	Campaign for Better Transport Lancashire
Alan Hurst	
Alan Wilson	Kendal Bus Users
Alan Whittington	Institute of Transport Administration
Barry Drelincourt	
Bob Muir	Friends of Mossley Station
Chris Anslow	Lancashire County Council
Chris Dale	TravelWatch NorthWest
Chris Holmes	Transport Planners Society
Chris Jarvis	Institute of Transport Administration
Cllr Fred Jackson	Blackpool Council
Dave Koring	Shropshire Council
David Beer	Passenger Focus
David Burton	South East Lancs Rail Action Partnership
David Butterworth	TravelWatch NorthWest
David Evans	Blackpool & Fylde Rail Users Association
David Langton	First TransPennine Express
David Simper	Blackpool Council
David Squire	Network Warrington
David Thrower	
Derek Carter	Furness Line Action Group
Fred Consterdine	Crewe & Shrewsbury Passenger Association

Gabriel Drew	East Cheshire Rail Users Group
Geoff Kerr	
Ian Conway	Lakes Line Rail User Group
Janet Briggs	North Cheshire Rail Users Group
Jeremy Walker	Blackpool Council
John Moorhouse	TravelWatch NorthWest
John Asquith	PrestonBus
John Culshaw	Mattersons Cranes
John Hart	TravelWatch NorthWest
John Owen	TravelWatch NorthWest
Kathryn O'Brien	First TransPennine Express
Keith Pennyfather	
Ken McKelvie	Ramblers Association
Ken Swallow	Chartered Institute of Logistics & Transport N West
Leonard Green	TravelWatch NorthWest
Les Burton	Stagecoach Merseyside/ South Lancs
Malcolm Conway	Lakes Line Rail User Group
Malcolm Richardson	Blackpool & Fylde Rail Users Association
Margaret Mitchell	Greater Manchester Users Group
Michael Wrigley	Support the Oldham Rochdale Line
Neil Caldwell	Chartered Institute of Logistics & Transport N West
Norman Adams	Greater Manchester Users Group
Paul Fawcett	TravelWatch NorthWest
Peter Dawson	Support the Oldham Rochdale Line
Peter Garvey	Greater Manchester Transport Campaign
Peter Johnston	
Peter Lamkin	Wrexham & Birkenhead Rail Users Association
Peter Robinson	TravelWatch NorthWest
Phil Nixon	Blackpool Council
Philip Briggs	North Cheshire Rail Users Group
Philip Harrison	
Preva Crossley	Friends of Hindley Station
Richard Rollins	TravelWatch NorthWest
Robert Talbot	TravelWatch NorthWest
Ron Herbert	
Ronald Schwarz	
Royce Franklin	Greenfield Rail Action Group
Russell Warhurst	University of Chester
Tom Lunt	
Tony Fawthrop	Greater Manchester Transport Campaign
Tony Potts	Copeland Rail Users Group
Tony Young	TravelWatch NorthWest
Trevor Roberts	Blackpool Transport Services Ltd