

TravelWatch NORTHWEST

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Transport Committee
 House of Commons
 London SW1A 0AA

31st August 2018

Dear Committee Members,

Rail timetable changes

1. TravelWatch NorthWest is an independent Community Interest Company representing all public transport users in North West England. We are pleased to give our views to this inquiry from a passenger's perspective.

2. We have been experiencing cancellation and performance problems in the North West (chiefly Northern) before the start of the May timetable and contacted Transport for the North to express our concerns. We cited the glaring example of Cumbria where, in our view, the ill – considered handover from TransPennine to Northern has been a complete failure for passengers, especially on the Windermere line. We were told that this line was regularly suffering 90% of the day's trains being cancelled with not all services are being replaced by buses.

3. The new timetable that commenced on 20th May exacerbated the problems. Due to a number of factors, mainly a shortage of drivers and conductors, partly arising from delays to the Bolton & Blackpool lines electrification, the outcome was disastrous for several lines. Again the Windermere line suffered badly with the service actually being totally replaced by buses for a while and then a private train charter company stepping in to offer a free rail service. The latter was good news for passengers although it is regrettable that we had reports of Northern not welcoming this novel enterprise which was instigated initially following collusion between West Coast Rail and the Community Rail Partnership and supported by local MP, Tim Farron.

4. We understand that Northern had advised the Department for Transport that as the conditions of the franchise had not been met by Network Rail the new timetable should be postponed but the Dft refused. The whole sorry state of affairs has been exacerbated by the prolonged industrial action over Northern's attempts to introduce Driver controlled door operation in compliance with the franchise agreement. There is still no end in sight for this dispute.

5. In fairness although the North West has suffered particularly badly, other areas of the Northern Franchise have been less adversely affected. The Leeds-Lancaster line for example which is operated from the east, has seen an improved service with only minor cancellations.

6. The new timetable also appeared ambitious for TransPennine Express with, for example, more trains serving Manchester Victoria adding to the congestion there. Punctuality and reliability took a nose dive and trains have been turned round short of their destinations e.g some which would have gone to Manchester Airport, very inconvenient for those passengers with flights to catch. Also, congestion issues on the Manchester Oxford Road corridor have been aggravated by the DfT's decision to cancel the construction of platforms 15 & 16 at Piccadilly. We understand that Network Rail had made it clear when the Ordsall Chord was first planned that service patterns would not work satisfactorily without the capacity improvements along the Piccadilly-Oxford Road corridor. The consequences of too many trains have become evident. We are not convinced that the digital railway will solve the capacity problem, perhaps squeezing another 10% capacity at most.

7. There are suggestions that there are too many separate players involved in timetable production - the DfT, ORR, Network Rail and train operators. As far as Network Rail is concerned there appears in general to have been a lack of attention to the practicability of operational factors and a lack of contingency to allow for perturbations in services both with TPE and Northern. Witness the Manchester Victoria example above. We have also received reports (including from within the industry!) that Network Rail is short of experienced timetablers at its Milton Keynes office following the closure of regional offices and loss of skilled staff.

8. By way of illustration of the kind of problems that were caused by the May 2018 timetable implementation a submission from the Friends of Eccles Station is attached as an Appendix.

9. Looking ahead, it is likely that operational ability will be incomplete in December with for example electric operations on the Bolton line delayed again, so there should be an agreement to operate what is known to work until confidence can be regained. Cancellations are still ongoing.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond

Yours sincerely,

John A Moorhouse

John Moorhouse, Company Secretary

Appendix - Submission from FRECCLES to TravelWatch NorthWest on Rail Timetable Changes

1. Friends of Eccles Station (FRECCLES) is a community organisation which aims to improve the environment and passenger services at Eccles Station and the immediate surrounding area, and to put the station back into the heart of the community. Eccles is a station in Greater Manchester on the historic Chat Moss line linking Manchester and Liverpool.
2. FRECCLES has long campaigned for a twice-hourly train service throughout the day at Eccles, which is clearly justified by the size of Eccles (population 40,000) , station footfall (190,000 p.a.), and by the opportunity to make Eccles an interchange hub for the west of Greater Manchester.
3. The following analysis focuses on the Monday to Friday rail service at Eccles, although the Saturday and Sunday services are also of importance to FRECCLES.
4. At the start of the current Northern franchise in April 2016, Eccles had an hourly service with trains running between Manchester Victoria and Liverpool Lime Street, plus 3 additional services in the morning peak (one to Manchester, two to Liverpool) and 3 additional services in the evening peak (one to Liverpool, two to Manchester). This gave Eccles 22 trains per day in each direction.
5. The Northern Franchise Train Service Requirements (TSR2) specified that Eccles would get an hourly service plus 3 additional services in each direction in the morning and evening peak periods, making 25 trains per day in each direction. This modest improvement was specified to be introduced in December 2017.
6. In November 2016, Northern announced that they would not be implementing the specified timetable improvements in December 2017, due to the delay to the Great Western Railway electrification scheme. Instead Northern said that the changes would be introduced in May 2018.
7. In May 2017, Northern consulted with FRECCLES and other stakeholders on how they would meet the TSR2 specification in May 2018. There would be an hourly Crewe to Liverpool Lime Street service calling at Eccles, and an additional 3 services in both the morning and evening extended peak periods (7 to 10 am and 4 to 7 pm) in each direction. The additional calls would be provided by the planned new hourly Chester to Leeds service. During the consultation, one of the Chester to Leeds calls in the morning and one in the evening (in both directions) were replaced by calls of additional Manchester Victoria to

Liverpool Lime Street trains. This would have given Eccles 25 trains per day in each direction.

8. In February 2018, Northern announced that delays to the Manchester to Preston electrification would further delay the changes then planned for May 2018. The actual timetable to be implemented on 20 May 2018 (<https://be803fe5c416e39d38ae-aa21086260d3bd4e072d597fe09c2e80.ssl.cf3.rackcdn.com/images/timetables/2018-05/summer-2018-timetables/Northern-15-1017-32pp-v2.pdf>) was not made available until early May. There would be no new Chester to Leeds service, and Eccles would only get an hourly service plus 1 additional train in each direction (one train in the morning to Manchester Victoria, one train in the evening from Manchester Victoria). Thus Eccles would only get 20 trains per day in each direction, 2 fewer than in April 2016, and 5 fewer than TSR2 originally specified for December 2017.
9. Most of the hourly calls at Eccles were on the Crewe to Liverpool service, but because two through services were omitted from the timetable (there was no 17.28 or 18.28 service from Liverpool Lime Street, or 17.16 or 18.28 service from Crewe), the corresponding calls at Eccles were to be provided by Manchester Victoria to Liverpool Lime Street services.
10. When the new timetable was implemented on 20 May 2018 there were numerous cancellations and delays to the Eccles services. In the following two weeks 95 Eccles services were cancelled (Monday to Friday, excluding strike days). On Sunday 27th May, 16 services were cancelled. In short, the train service was atrocious.
11. Northern replaced the standard May 2018 timetable by an emergency timetable on 2nd June, which coincided with the planned closure of Liverpool Lime Street for engineering upgrades. The emergency timetable provided an hourly service at Eccles in each direction, with no additional trains in the peak periods. No printed timetables or posters were provided at Eccles Station during this period. Cancellations and delays continued, but at a reduced rate.
12. Northern re-instated their standard May 2018 timetable on 30th July 2018. As stated above, Eccles now has only 20 trains per day in each direction, 5 fewer than specified in TSR2 for December 2017. FRECCLES is still waiting to hear when the TSR2 specification will be provided. The current service leaves passengers confused and stranded, as there is no obvious pattern to the destination or origin of services to/from Manchester. Commuters who use the 07.14 or 08.14 train to travel to Manchester Piccadilly in the morning find they have no return service from Manchester Piccadilly after the 17.23 train until the 20.22 train. For some reason the published timetables omit the calls at Deansgate between Eccles and Manchester Oxford Road, despite

Northern having been repeatedly told about this error.

13. In summary, the May 2018 timetable was a disaster for Eccles passengers, even before it was implemented, and its implementation was appalling. An opportunity to provide a half-decent rail service at Eccles, and to start to provide a good interchange between rail and tram at Eccles, has been missed, and Eccles passengers are stuck with a worsened service until December 2018 and probably until May 2019.
14. A list of cancellations at Eccles since 20 May 2018 is available on the FRECCLES website at <http://freccles.org.uk/cancellations.asp> .