

TravelWatch NORTHWEST

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Winner of CILT award for best practice in passenger transport (2013)

promoting quality public transport.....

Rail Survey Report Spring 2019



(photo Chris Dale)

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1. Introduction

1.1 TravelWatch NorthWest (TWNW) is an independent Community Interest Company representing all users of public transport in the North West. Membership is open to any not for profit organisation representing the interests of users or potential users of public transport. TWNW holds regular conferences open to the public at various locations in the North West that debate issues of interest and concern to public transport users who have the opportunity to contribute and raise their concerns. TWNW's chief purpose is to influence, by research and campaigning, public transport policy in the North West always with passengers' interests foremost.

1.2 During April and May 2019 TravelWatch NorthWest (TWNW) surveyed 180 specimen passenger rail services mainly across the North West of England. The purpose of the survey was to provide a broad assessment of service provision as it directly affected passengers. We had previously undertaken a similar survey of 120 Northern services in 2013.

1.3 The service groups surveyed broke down as follows –

- Northern –135 journeys
- TransPennine (TPE) – 26 journeys
- Others - Virgin Trains (11), CrossCountry (3), Merseyrail Wirral Line (3), East Midlands Trains (2)

1.4 The survey form covered aspects of on train and information at stations. (see Appendix).

2. Routes covered

- **Macclesfield to Stockport/Manchester**
2 CrossCountry, 11 Northern.
- **Manchester/Wigan/Bolton/Preston/Lancaster/Morecambe**
24 Northern, 3 TPE.
- **Windermere – Oxenholme/ Preston/Manchester**
15 Northern, 6 TPE
- **Preston/Lancaster to Carnforth/Barrow/C Coast**
16 Northern.
- **Preston/Ormskirk/Liverpool**
6 Northern
- **Manchester/Wigan/Kirkby/Liverpool (all routes)**
8 Northern, 6 TPE, 1 EMT
- **Manchester – Wilmslow/ Crewe/Knutsford**
3 Northern
- **Tod/Littleborough - Manchester**
12 Northern
- **Manchester Airport – Manchester Victoria**
1 TPE
- **Settle Carlisle Line**
3 Northern
- **Manchester – Greenfield – Leeds-York**
9 TPE, 2 Northern
- **West Coast Main Line**
11 Virgin Trains, 1 TPE
- **Preston –Blackpool**
6 Northern
- **Manchester/Preston – Blackburn/ Clitheroe**
9 Northern
- **13. Alfreton – Chesterfield - Leeds**
2 Northern 1 CrossCountry
- **Manchester – Marple - Sheffield**
5 Northern, 1 East Midlands
- **Carlisle – Hexham**
2 Northern
- **Skipton-Leeds**
12 Northern
- **Wirral Line**
3 Merseyrail

3. Results - Northern

3.1 Departing & Alighting stations

- Where there was a ticket office 113 out of 117 were open (97%)
- Where provided 123 out of 126 (98%) ticket machines were working and 118 (94%) conveniently located. Just two examples of poor location were specifically commented on. At Arnside, the one machine was located in the shelter on the Westbound (Barrow) platform. It was not visible to passengers entering the station to cross the bridge or from the disabled access on the opposite side to use Eastbound trains (Lancaster & beyond) and no signposting was in place to indicate its location or the need to purchase a ticket. The ticket machine at Kendal was also reported to be inconveniently located.
- Customer Information screens were noted at 131 out of 133 stations and all were in working order.
- Most stations visited did not have automatic ticket barriers – 174 out of 258 stations visited (67%). Where they were provided only one was not working. At stations without barriers ticket checks were carried out at only 20 out of 258 stations (8%). However, many of these were unstaffed.

3.2 On the Train

3.2.1

- 75 out of 129 trains arrived on time (58%) with a further 43 up to 5 minutes late (91% 0-5). Two trains were over 20 minutes late because of a train failure (Class 142 with brake problems) and a points failure at Cheadle Hulme. 17 out of the 135 journeys were undertaken in the daytime peak periods (07.30 - 09.00 and 16.30 – 18.30). In this small sample there was no discernible worsening of punctuality compared with off peak.
- Destination panels were accurate on 98 out of 125 observations (78%).
- Ticket inspection was carried out on 85 out of 135 occasions (63%). This figure is rather worse than in the survey undertaken in 2013 when 73% of tickets were checked. There were a number of instances where ticket inspection throughout the train was impeded by non gangwayed units coupled together to provide more capacity e.g. 2 x Class 142s. A number of journeys were also relatively short e.g. Lancaster to Carnforth. Unfortunately, on only 5 occasions was an announcement made about the lack of ticket examination (10%). The line between Manchester and Wigan was noted as particularly poor for ticket checks. For example, on a journey from Wigan North Western to Wilmslow via Manchester the surveyor noted that on the first part of the journey from Wigan to Manchester the conductor made no announcements at all and did not carry out a ticket check. In contrast after a crew change at Manchester Oxford Road the new conductor made regular

announcements on all aspects of the journey and carried out a ticket check after Cheadle Hulme.

- Where the conductor did carry out a ticket check it is pleasing to note that on by far the majority of occasions (97%) he or she was deemed to be courteous and/ or helpful.
- It was also good to note that, where inspected, most toilets were working properly – 105 occasions out of 119 (88%). Even so, with many stations not having toilets, any failure is annoying.
- Overcrowding occurred on 12 of the 135 journeys, with 5 of these in the peak. An observation at Bolton on 4th April is worth relating. The 08.17 service to Rochdale via Manchester Victoria – a 2 car Class 150 from the Blackburn line) – was delayed and did not leave until 08.24, very packed with passengers and leaving many behind on the platform. The following Manchester bound service, the 08.23 to Piccadilly, composed of 4 cars (142 and 150/2) left at 08.30 completely crammed with passengers. By contrast the surveyor travelled in the train following that (to Manchester Victoria) which was a 4-car formation with plenty of room.

3.2.2 On Train Information was noted as follows –

- On 15 out of 22 occasions no explanation for late running was given. On some of these instances the delay was 5 minutes or less.
- On 45 out of 134 occasions (34%) no announcements were made before departure regarding calling points.
- The incidence of announcing the next station was much better though with this noted on 113 out of 135 occasions (84%). The introduction of automatic on train announcements is doing much to bring more consistency to this important facility.
- Announcements regarding safety aspects were patchy with these being noted on 77 out of the 135 journeys made (57%).
- More trains now have on train screens with full station calling information. However, many of our journeys were made on Pacers which of course, with their planned withdrawal anticipated, are not being so equipped. Therefore, on just 40 out of the 135 journeys (30%) was this comprehensive information noted.

4. Results - TransPennine Express

4.1 Departure & Alighting stations

- All 26 ticket offices observed were open and all stations had ticket machines which were all working and conveniently located. (100%)
- Customer Information screens were noted at all stations and all were in working order.
- 31 stations out of 41 observed had automatic ticket barriers. They were all in working order.

4.2 On the Train

4.2.1

- 10 out of 26 trains arrived on time (38%) with a further 9 up to 5 minutes late (73% 0-5). No trains were over 20 minutes late. TPE runs some tightly timed services with complex junctions to negotiate but punctuality has improved following some remedial measures.
- Destination panels were accurate on all 22 services (100%) where observations were carried out.
- Ticket inspection was carried out on 16 out of 22 occasions recorded (73%). This figure is higher than on Northern.
- It is pleasing to note that where ticket checks were carried out the conductor was deemed to be courteous and/ or helpful.
- On only two instances toilets were not fully working. In one the surveyor noted that the hand wash was not working – said to be a common fault with Class 185s.
- Overcrowding occurred on 6 out of the 26 journeys made (23%). One instance was on a 3 car 185 between Manchester Piccadilly and Victoria in the morning peak. Again, on the same day (7th May) in the morning peak a 4 car Class 350 between Lancaster and Manchester Piccadilly had standing passengers. An evening peak observation on a similar 350 also saw standing passengers between Preston and Oxenholme, where the surveyor alighted. The new higher capacity trains should help with these busy Anglo Scottish services.

4.2.2 On Train Information was noted as follows –

- On only one occasion (out of 25) was no announcement made before departure regarding calling points. Similarly, the incidence of announcing the next station was of a high standard with again no announcements made on only one journey.
- As on Northern announcements regarding safety aspects were patchy with these being noted on 14 out of 24 journeys (58%)
- Most trains had on train screens but not all with full station calling information.

5. Results - Others

5.1 Departing and Alighting Stations

- All ticket offices were open except for Stockport after 22.30.
- Ticket machines were provided at all stations surveyed except on the Wirral Line; all were in working order and conveniently located.

5.2 On the Train

5.2.1

- Punctuality was generally good with just 5 trains between 6 and 10 minutes late and no serious delays.
- Destination panels were 100% correct.
- Just over half of Virgin trains travelled on had no ticket inspection. Some were short distance journeys e.g. Lancaster – Preston, Wigan - Preston. However, this also occurred between Oxenholme – Wigan and even Euston - Preston on one occasion. We do receive a number of comments about the lack of ticket checking on Virgin Trains particularly between intermediate stations on the West Coast Main Line in our region. There were also no ticket checks on all three CrossCountry services travelled on which included Macclesfield to Manchester and Chesterfield to Leeds.
- Where seen conductors were courteous and helpful.
- All toilets surveyed were working.
- There were just 2 instances of overcrowding – on Virgin Trains between Lancaster and Preston, because of cancellation of a previous TPE service, and a on a CrossCountry train between Chesterfield and Leeds. This latter was a 5 car Voyager working a Bristol – Glasgow via Newcastle service on Sunday (a popular day for rail travel) on 31st March.
- On train information was consistently good throughout.

6. Summary and conclusions

Generally speaking, the survey has shown an overall improvement in standards of reliability and on train standards following the debacle after (and in some instances preceding) the May 2018 timetable changes. On the trains surveyed overcrowding was in the main not a serious issue, although just 12% of journeys were made during the peak. The major cause of concern on Northern in particular was the relatively poor level of on train ticket inspection. We believe there is also room for improvement in ticket inspection on Virgin services. We believe we did not reflect some of the capacity problems experienced at peak times and look to the new Northern and TPE trains as well as infrastructure improvements to address this.

Appendix – Survey Form

Date					Reporter			
From					To			
Unit Number/ type					Number of carriages:			
Departure station								
Ticket office	Yes	No			Open	Yes	No	N/A
Ticket machine(s)	Yes	No			Working	Yes	No	N/A
Convenient location of machine (s)			Yes	No				
CIS (departure info)	Yes	No			Working	Yes	No	N/A
Automatic Barrier	Yes	No			Working	Yes	No	N/A
Ticket Check	Yes	No						
Train								
Departure/Arrival time - Scheduled:		/			Actual:		/	
Each destination panel correct					Yes	No		
Ticket inspection and/or fare collection					Yes	No		
After which stations							
Announcement re lack of ticket inspection					Yes	No	N/A	
Conductor courteous and helpful					Yes	No	N/A	
Toilets working					Yes	No		
Train overcrowded					Yes	No		
If yes – between which stations:							
Greatest number of standing passengers in your carriage							
Information systems:								
Apology/explanation if late					Yes	No	N/A	
Announcements re calling points (including connections if any)					Yes	No		
Announcements re approaching next station					Yes	No		
Announcements re safety					Yes	No		
On train screens provided	Yes	No			Full stn. calling information	Yes	No	N/A
Alighting station								
Automatic Barrier	Yes	No			Working	Yes	No	N/A
Ticket check	Yes	No						
Notes/ comments including comment on tkt machines, cleanliness, train toilets, etc (continue overleaf if required)								