

CONFERENCE REPORT

Thursday 13th October 2011
Storey Creative Industries Centre, Lancaster
Conference kindly supported by Passenger Focus

1. Welcome and Introduction

The Chairman, Chris Dale welcomed delegates to Lancaster and thanked Passenger Focus for its kind support. He described some of the work of TravelWatch North West since the last conference.

Consultation responses had been provided for:

- Ø Rail Passenger Information (ORR)
- Ø Airline users representation (CAA)
- Ø Role of Traffic Commissioners (DfT)
- Ø High Speed Rail (DfT)
- Ø 2nd Metrolink City Crossing (TfGM)

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

- Ø West Coast Rail 250
- Ø Rail in the Hope Valley
- Ø High Speed Rail
- Ø Trans Pennine Express Stakeholders Conference
- Ø Northern Trains Stakeholders Conference
- Ø House of Commons All Party Light Rail Group
- Ø Merseytravel
- Ø Merseyside Integrated Transport Forum
- Ø Stagecoach Bus

Chris also referred to the gaps left by the Spending Review and indicated that the TravelWatch movement was in close touch with all parties to try and ensure that passengers retain a voice in decision making and any detrimental consequences are exposed.

2. Bus Services in Lancashire

Tim Gornall, Bus & Supported Transport Manager, Lancashire County Council

Tim began by explaining the context that supports public transport operations in Lancashire. The county has a population of 1.7 million, 22% of which is rural based

and 78% urban based. The County's subsidised bus network operates with a budget of £7 million, and a further £1 million to support 9 community bus schemes. The Senior's concession scheme costs the County £22 million but the Government grant falls short of this at £17 million, leaving the County to fund the remainder.

20 Commercial bus operators provide 80% of services with 57 million trips per year. 103 subsidised services cater for 35,000 passengers each day.

The effect of Government cuts means that the County has to save £179 million over the next 3 years, and has had to create measures to achieve this. For transport a criteria has been agreed that a minimum of 40% of revenue must be achieved through the fare box. However this will only save £823,000 (10% of the total budget reduction), so additional measures have to be considered. Through LTP3 the subsidy level will receive further consideration by March 2012. Priorities will be Connectivity, Community Link, travel to/from work, and Local Link. Consolidation with other transport provision, such as social ambulances, is also being studied with a view to exploiting resources to an optimum and with an implementation timetable of 2 years.

Future challenges are the consequences of the County's budget reductions and the Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG), which will be reduced by 20% next year.

New initiatives include the refurbished Blackpool Tramway and to which LCC has contributed to the £101 million investment. 10 new Bombardier trams coming into service next April on the Starr Gate – Fleetwood service and will provide the majority of services with heritage vehicles filling in where necessary. It was noted, however, that Blackpool Transport retains all fares revenue.

The Pennine Reach service providing a circular route linking Blackburn, Darwen and Accrington is the subject of a £40 million bid with DfT and the result should be known in December. Service 12 linking Heysham, Morecambe and Lancaster has achieved a 20 minute journey time, faster than a car journey, by virtue of extensions to bus lanes.

In a discussion session reference was made to Taxi Bus which may receive some attention in the future. A Carnforth Station integrated transport hub is under consideration but has some traffic challenges and would also require some re-routing of Stagecoach services.

The ongoing effects of the service cuts will be considered with a Quality Impact Assessment, travelling research, and local stakeholder consultation. Communities that have lost their bus service will receive social monitoring and there will be consideration of the impact of passenger segments where service cuts have occurred. (Tim to let Secretary know savings from road budget)

The concession scheme is cause for concern as there is discrepancy between LCC and government figures which may lead to Lancashire becoming the country's worst affected County. However it was also noted that the use of services by pass holders does vastly contribute to the preservation of many bus services. In Blackpool the use of passes on buses and the consequent overcrowding has led to a decision to now accept them on tram services.

3. High Speed Rail

Susan Williams, Director, North West Rail Campaign

The Campaign believes that the North West has been starved of rail investment for many years despite having the UK's 2nd largest economy, but the productivity gap is £30 billion. Consequently it is arguing for the High Speed Rail route to be expanded beyond the current London – Birmingham proposal to serve Manchester and other northern cities as well as eventually Scotland.

The High Speed Rail network initiative has a budget of £32 billion and the Transport Minister will decide upon its implementation in December. However a pre-requisite for Manchester will be the investment in the Northern Hub which will require a sum of £530 million.

HSR2 will provide relief to the West Coast mainline, which is now full, and new trains will each accommodate 1100 passengers and will complete the journey from London to Birmingham in 49 minutes. The line will have capacity for 18 trains per hour in each direction. With an extension to the North West, trains will reach Manchester in 80 minutes and Liverpool in 95 minutes with Scotland being served in 3 hours 45 minutes. Benefits to the NW economy are estimated at £5 billion per year, 1 million jobs, restored business confidence, more freight capacity and resultant modal shift.

Consideration will have to be given to station location as the Minister is of the opinion that only a city centre – city centre service will be acceptable. Decisions will be based on demand and connectivity, sustainability and environment, and engineering constraints. Intermediate stations will be determined by demand.

In discussion a preference was expressed for a “Hybrid Bill” to include a total HS network rather than a piecemeal approach. It was recognised that the HSR2 line will relieve the West Coast but this should remain as a main artery to provide more local services. Euston as a terminal for HSR2 will present challenges as it is currently crowded and there was disappointment that the route will now likely by pass Heathrow. Equally there is concern that fares may be levelled at a premium price and market forces will need to be considered with good value provision at off peak times. It was, however, noted that HSR1 had introduced large investment and regeneration in areas it serves in the UK and the near continent.

Need to think about intermediate stations N of Preston and the effects of eventual extension to Scotland on routing/ station location to/in the NW/NE.

4. “Just a Minute” Session

The “Just a Minute” session was introduced to give delegates the opportunity to air views of issues that affected 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:

- Ø Predatory bus service operation in East Lancashire
- Ø Modern design of trains being less comfortable
- Ø Caution on campaigns to change train fare structures
- Ø Concern at cascade of old train stock to the North West
- Ø Local bus services in communities/ integration with school services

- Ø Rolling stock for NW electrification
- Ø HSR2 – Need for a more coordinated approach from campaigning regions.
- Ø Rail franchising in the North must have equality of service standards.
- Ø No relationship between various weekly ticket fares in Greater Manchester.
- Ø Consequences of Electrification for through services to Barrow & Windermere
- Ø Rising costs for Commercial Bus Operators a threat to rural services.
- Ø Blackpool – Colne service – services terminating Burnley when late.

5. Arnside Viaduct Reconstruction and Replacement Services

George Thomas, Commercial Contracts Manager, First TransPennine Express

George began by giving a brief history of Arnside Viaduct. It was built in 1856 on cast iron stanchions and was double tracked in 1863. It has a 51 span structure but its load capacity had been reduced due to wear and tear over the years.

The objective of the reconstruction work was to replace the superstructure and reinstate a 60 mph speed limit from the current 20 mph. New deck units were laid along the whole length with walk ways for engineering access. Engineering challenges were access to the site from adjoining land and roads, weather during one of the coldest spring periods in recent years, working over tidal water, and achieving programme timescales.

For the train operators the objectives were:

- Ø Delivery of train replacement plan
- Ø Ensure the disruption period is made best use of.
- Ø Minimising disruption to passengers
- Ø Running an optimum number of trains
- Ø Efficient rail – coach interchange
- Ø Minimising journey times
- Ø Sourcing strategy for coach provision
- Ø Risk assessment of all locations
- Ø Provision of sufficient and trained staff

In operating an acceptable contingency plan 2 coaches per train, with easy call up additions, were provided to cope with passenger numbers and a rail shuttle was retained between Arnside and Carnforth, with most trains progressing to Lancaster and beyond. A special timetable was introduced in 2 phases to cope with the initial stage which included the closure of Lindal tunnel and later, when trains were restored between Grange and Barrow. It was decided that Oxenholme would be the preferred interchange with the West Coast main line as it presented the best options for access and traffic management. Weekend disruptions to the WCML also provided challenges and so flexibility and refinement plans were built in to the operation.

Provision of human resources was a major priority to ensure that sufficient trained staff were available to cover the complex set of diagrams. Revenue protection staff were also deployed at Barrow, Grange and Oxenholme as well as multi skilled staff at all locations.

Early liaison took place with stakeholders at all levels to ensure that there was complete understanding of the arrangements and this included publicity days in affected localities, media briefings and distribution of special printed timetables and posters. After the completion of the work a special fare offer was made available to passengers for a period of 2 weeks to express appreciation of their understanding and patience during the disruption.

During the period the number of journeys on the line was reduced by 29% and revenue was down by 32%, but there was much appreciation expressed by local communities and TPE/NR received the Outstanding Teamwork Award from ACORP.

In discussion TPE and Network Rail were congratulated on the whole operation and the completion of the work on schedule.

6. Passenger Focus 2011/12 Work Plan

David Sidebottom, Passenger Team Director, Passenger Focus

In 2010 Passenger Focus had a new work programme and set of responsibilities with bus and coach passenger representation being added to its rail remit. However the squeeze on public spending made things extremely tough on the organisation. There was a lack of clarity about its future and it was feared that it would join the “bonfire of quangos.” However its work was recognised as important and it survived but with a 50% budget cut applicable from 1st April 2011. It therefore had to take some hard decisions about its future direction.

In its slimmed down form it is now concentrating on a smaller number of passenger priorities, working on the way it is presented and new ways of maintaining and developing relationships and contact with other passenger bodies. PF is now divided into 2 teams, a Passenger Issues team dealing with passenger themes and policy, and a Passenger Team liaising with passengers, maintaining relationships and tackling poor performance.

Current work-streams are:

- Ø Building up Coach Passenger Representation
- Ø Use of Rail Ticket websites
- Ø Regional Bus service surveys
- Ø Euston passenger priorities
- Ø Study on “Getting to the Station”
- Ø Train delay compensation regimes
- Ø Passenger information during delays
- Ø Bus Pass survey in 23 areas

Future plans include studies on bus punctuality, management of train disruptions, simplified rail ticketing and improvement of value, and the resolution of rail complaints appeals. Work will also continue into rail franchise replacement, long term industry planning and accountability of bus service cuts.

Passenger Focus is working with the House of Commons Transport Select committee looking into bus services after the spending review through a

transparent consultative process with passengers and undertaking impact assessments. A Best Practice consultation guide will eventually be published.

The regional structure will be developed by dialogue with regional passenger groups leading into some formality of structure in the New Year.

Passenger Focus will continue with its core principles and retain a research and policy base, trying to influence the right people at the right time and place as well as developing its mutual involvement with common interest groups. It will seek places at top tables in discussions over major issues with a target of influence.

In discussion the issues of booking office withdrawals and the growth in the installation of station ticket barriers were raised. PF feels that these must only be considered after transparent consultation and evidence that acceptable alternative systems are in place and passengers are not unduly inconvenienced.

7. Next Conference

Thursday 9th February, 2012 in Wigan Town Hall.

Attendance

Name	Organisation
Adrian Dunning	North West Transport Roundtable
Alan Wilson	Kendal Bus Users
Allan McLean	Virgin Trains
Cedric Green	North Cheshire RUG
Chris Dale	TravelWatch NorthWest (TWNW)
Chris Jarvis	Inst. of Transport Administration
Colin Barnett	Bus Users UK
David Burton	SE Lancs Rail Action Partnership
David Butterworth	TWNW
David Evans	Blackpool & Fylde RUA
David Koring	Shropshire Council
David Mallender	First TransPennine Express
David Sidebottom	Passenger Focus
David Thrower	
David Wood	TravelWatch Midlands West
Dennis Harrison	Wirral Transport Users Assoc
Frank Consterdine	Crewe & Shrewsbury Passrs Ass.
Gabriel Drew	East Cheshire RUG
Geoff Kerr	
George Thomas	First/Keolis TransPennine Ltd
Ian Boyd	Halton Borough Council
Ian McDermott	North Trafford Rail Group

Ian Watson	
Jim Davies	
Jo Guiver	University of C Lancs
John Moorhouse	TWNW
John Aaron	
John Hart	TWNW
John Hobbs	North Cheshire RUG
John Owen	TWNW
June Chadwick	Wirral Older Peoples Parliament
Keith Pennyfather	
Ken McKelvie	Ramblers Association
Ken Swallow	CILT
Malcolm Conway	Lakes Line RUG & RailFuture NW
Malcolm Richardson	Blackpool & Fylde RUA
Michael Wrigley	STORM
Paul Fawcett	TWNW
Peter Lamkin	Wrexham & Birkenhead RUA
Peter Robinson	TWNW
Richard Chapman	Rochdale Borough Council
Richard Rollins	TWNW
Robert Parker	Furness Line Action Group
Robert Talbot	TWNW
Russell Oakes	CILT Merseyside & Warrington
Russell Warhurst	University of Chester
Steve Clapham	Friends of Eccles Station
Steven Jones	Lancashire CPRE
Susan Williams	High Speed Rail Campaign
Tim Gornall	Lancashire County Council
Tom Lunt	
Tony Young	TWNW