

TravelWatch NORTHWEST

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

promoting quality public transport.....

West Coast Main Line Improvement works between Warrington, Carlisle and Scotland April and May 2016



Oxenholme interchange

July 2016

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 The railway has to be maintained and whenever this happens passengers' journeys are disrupted and in many cases road replacement services are provided using coaches, buses or minibuses and even taxis in some cases. Journey quality invariably suffers and for many years this has been a focus of attention for TWNW. In June 2006, we published a report on this issue and we have undertaken a number of exercises since then looking at passengers' experiences at such times. There has been a good deal to criticise over the years and it does appear to be a challenge to satisfy passengers' needs when engineering work takes place and road replacement services are substituted. Having said that we have seen improvements in some areas.

1.3 The recommendations on good practice made in that 2006 report still broadly hold true today. They were as follows -

- Where closure is necessary it should be kept to the shortest possible length and for the shortest possible time
- Compensation for passengers using replacement bus services should be considered
- Minimise length of bus journey, provide express buses as well as intermediate stopping buses and
- Use service buses where feasible with rail ticket acceptance
- Take advice on planned road works on selected routes
- Ensure bus drivers are conversant with the route and stopping points
- Operate a single point of dedicated contact help-line
- Ensure suitability of interchange point with sufficient help staff to effect seamless transfers and optimised connections
- Provide clearly identifiable temporary bus stops at affected stations
- Consider additional authorised stopping points e.g. in town/village centres
- Provide good quality comfortable vehicles with adequate luggage capacity and provision for passengers with special needs
- Provide drinking water for passengers on long transfers
- Ensure clear directional signage and posters at stations
- Ensure vehicles display purpose and correct destination signage

- Ensure all front line staff are fully briefed on the disruption well in advance of start date
- Provide information to passengers at strategic points well in advance of start date
- Optimal use of media in affected localities to inform travelling public in advance of and during disruption period
- Display and distribute posters, leaflets in advance of and during disruption period
- Ensure destination screens at stations are suitably amended to cater for disruption and clear alternative information is displayed
- Ensure optimum communication with passengers and stakeholders in lead up period
- Continually monitor loadings and take remedial action where necessary
- Optimise revenue protection and provide travelling staff on buses for safety and security issues
- Ensure contingencies are in place to cater for overcrowding, breakdowns, missed connections, and engineering over-runs

1.4 During this period on every weekend from 23rd April to 30th May the West Coast Main Line was blocked for engineering work at various points between Carnforth and Carlisle. An elaborate network of rail replacement road services (RRRS) was provided between generally Preston and Carlisle and intermediate points. On some weekends RRRS were also operating between Carlisle and Glasgow/ Edinburgh.

1.5 Members of TravelWatch NorthWest travelled on and observed rail and road replacement services during the above engineering blockade. A limited sample of journeys was made but this report hopefully gives a flavour of events as experienced. There was much to be commended particularly in assistance given at many of the rail/coach transfer arrangements that were observed but there is room for improvement. We trust the following report will be taken in the spirit of constructive comments which could be taken into account in future planning of engineering work alternative arrangements.

1.6 Journeys and observations were made on the following dates –

- Saturday and Sunday 23rd and 24th April,
- Saturdays 30th April, 7th May, 14th May,
- Saturday and Sunday 28th and 29th May.

A detailed account of these experiences is given in the Appendix.

2. Summary

2.1 From our limited exercise there was much to commend especially with regard to the provision and helpfulness of staff at interchanges. For example the surveyor at Oxenholme observed a well-planned operation with standby coaches in place, a temporary waiting room in the car park used for the coach services (for cars an off-site car park with free shuttle bus was provided), with

good information (in advance in leaflets, posters, journey planner and on the day with signs and staff) and in 158 coach arrivals and departures only three issues (late/overloaded) which were all solved quickly and effectively by the staff on the ground.

2.2 Arrangements at Lancaster were also observed to work well and well coordinated planning was also evident at Carlisle, particularly with respect to the parking of buses in between turns in the very limited room available in the forecourt of Citadel station. This was exacerbated by the Northern replacement coaches between Carlisle and Appleby covering the long term land slip closure on the Settle-Carlisle line at Eden Brows near Armathwaite.

2.3 However there was some inconsistency, and examples of lack of quality and indifferent levels of information provision (at change points, stations, on board trains and on board buses). For example it was noted that information at Kendal station was non-existent, some RRRS were inadequate and inappropriate for users, destination information on RRRS was inconsistent and revenue protection on RRRS was non-existent.

2.4 For example on three occasions a 17 seater minibus was observed on the Oxenholme to Windermere service. Whilst seating availability was adequate there were particular problems accommodating the substantial quantity of luggage including rucksacks on this popular tourist route. The aisle had to be used for rucksacks.

2.5 On another occasion (a Lancaster to Windermere service), what appeared to be a high capacity coach normally used for school contracts was provided and this was wholly unsuited to a rail replacement service. It had seating for 70 passengers with a 3 + 2 very cramped seating pattern. Many passengers complained about the lack of space.

2.6 Although there were inconsistencies in the provision of destination information on the RRRS, there were many good examples where it was provided and this was seen to improve as the weeks passed. This is encouraging as in the past it has been the norm for no destination to be shown - just a label saying "rail replacement bus". Calling points were also noted to be displayed in many cases.

2.7 In every journey made tickets were not examined. We have observed revenue protection being carried out on other previous rail replacement services and we cannot see why this should not be carried out as a standard procedure to guard against fraudulent travel.

2.8 We also encountered inconsistency in the rules governing the conveyance of bikes, push-chairs, wheel chairs and also food and drink on RRRS. Though not directly relevant to the WCML replacement services Arriva Rail North is operating RRRS between Carlisle and Appleby covering the long term land slip closure on the Settle-Carlisle line at Eden Brows near Armathwaite. One surveyor was unable to take a hot drink on a Northern RRRS (Carlisle –

Appleby) but this appeared to not be a problem on VT replacement coaches on the WCML route. The surveyor was advised that, on the latter services, bikes, push-chairs and wheel chairs could be taken if there was sufficient room in the holds. We understand that Northern has stated that it has no power to impose conditions relating to the conveyance of these items on the bus/coach companies that are providing RRRS and in many cases it appears to be up to individual drivers to decide what is permitted and what is not.

2.9 We were advised that some bus companies, including Stagecoach and EYMS, have a total ban on passengers bringing any food and any drink on board their buses, and this also applies to many smaller companies, where the matter is at the discretion of the driver. It has been suggested to us that any such restrictions are not publicised although Northern has stated that dogs, bikes and push chairs cannot be conveyed. The current Northern timetable for the Leeds – Settle – Carlisle which includes RRRS makes no reference to any such restrictions. We understand that Northern has stated that the ban on hot drinks is that it is one of safety - the possibility of one passenger spilling a drink on another.

3. Conclusions and recommendations

3.1 This was a major protracted and complex operation of rail replacement services affecting long distance and local passengers and visitors to a major tourist area – the Lake District - at a popular time of year. Many passengers had to very inconveniently change from train to road coach at Preston, then change road coaches at Oxenholme to get to Windermere. This would have been further aggravated by bad weather. Revising the arrangements to provide more through coaches running Preston - Lancaster - Oxenholme - Windermere would have helped.

3.2 However in the main our observations encountered much to commend with helpful staff at interchange points and timely action taken to rectify problems when they occurred.

3.3 Traditionally rail companies have always warned that bicycles, prams/pushchairs and wheel chairs may not be conveyed on RRRS. It would appear that the increasing use of high quality road coaches with large luggage holds has led some RRRS operators to agree to convey these items. There is also the question of food and drink, including hot drinks. There is generally no ban on trains and some passengers might well assume that the conditions applying to travelling by train (e.g. being able to consume a hot drink while travelling) would also apply when travelling on the RRRS. It is a difficult area but, given the experience of our surveyor, clearer information for passengers is needed. Ideally, train operators should have a clear policy that applies to every hired coach regardless of coach operator.

3.4 We have said many times previously that Cumbria has consistently lost out in the timing of WCML improvement work which hits the high proportion of leisure travel north of Lancaster peaking at summer weekends, bank holidays

and school holidays. We can only plead that more recognition is given to these passengers and their needs.

3.5 We will always maintain that there should be as full a use as possible of diversionary routes in future planning as passengers prefer to keep on a train rather than a replacement bus even though this is likely to mean extended journey times. Research by Passenger Focus in the Autumn of 2012 confirms this. However regrettably the Settle – Carlisle line was not available!

3.6 The research referred to above also said that passengers were unhappy at paying a train fare and getting a bus journey and that it warranted a discount on the normal train fare. We have long advocated this approach which we believe should logically now form the basis of compensating all passengers affected by pre-planned disruption (and in short term situations caused by a problem within the rail industry) where replacement buses are used.

3.7 Recommendations for further attention are -

- ***Provision and quality of information at unstaffed stations (e.g, Kendal - a large town).***
- ***Capacity and suitability of buses/ coaches. e.g. Inadequacy of mini buses for luggage and use of a school service vehicle with very cramped seating area and a narrow gangway. A detailed vehicle specification for planned replacement services would be useful.***
- ***Inconsistency of destination information on RRRS, though this is improving.***
- ***RRRS driver conduct and route knowledge – again there is a need for more consistency.***
- ***Revenue inspection was non-existent – is this acceptable?***
- ***Inconsistency and arbitrariness in the rules and practice governing the conveyance of bikes, prams, wheelchairs, food and drink, etc. on RRRS. Passengers need clearer direction.***
- ***Ensuring clear information on trains affected by the RRRS – especially on train announcements of onward arrangements.***

John Moorhouse
Company Secretary

APPENDIX

A1. Saturday 23rd April

Background

A1.1 The West Coast Main Line was closed between Milnthorpe and Carlisle. Virgin Trains (VT) provided two buses an hour from Carlisle to Preston. At XX:20 there was a bus stopping only at Penrith (none of the VT buses stopped at Oxenholme or Lancaster) and at XX:30 there was an express bus. TransPennine Express (TPE) was providing one bus an hour at XX:45 from Carlisle to Lancaster calling at Penrith and Oxenholme. There was about a 20 minute gap between the arrival of trains from Scotland and the departures of the buses. Passengers from Oxenholme to London Euston would have to change at both Lancaster and Preston.

Arrangements at Carlisle

A1.2 At 10.00 queuing for buses was orderly with one queue for the express (Preston) and one for the Penrith stopper. There were several A-boards giving times of the buses but no leaflets. Outside the station were two coaches – passengers were directed to these. The ‘Penrith Queue’ being directed first, followed by the ‘Preston Queue’. There were five Abellio and two VT staff directing people.

A1.3 Initially there were 6 passengers on the stopping bus, but the Preston bus was not large enough (57 seats), and so an extra 9 people were directed to the ‘Penrith bus’. There were no ticket checks

Journey (10.20 to Penrith)

A1.4 The coach, a 57-seater had no indication of the company owning the bus. It had a large capacity hold: consequently there were steep steps to board the bus. There was no sign on the front of the bus giving destination and calling points, just a label stating Rail Replacement Bus and a number in large letters. The quality of the bus was excellent, and the standard and smoothness of driving was excellent. Arrived Penrith early.

Arrangements at Penrith

A1.5 There were two VT staff, and one person from Abellio. A discussion took place on the subject of conveyance of bikes, prams, push chairs, wheel chairs and food and drink on rail replacement road vehicles (***see paragraphs 2.8 & 2.9***). It appeared also that dogs could be taken on these services at the discretion of the driver, and they usually were accepted. A family group with a German Shepherd was observed to take it with them on a coach to Preston.

The return journey (10.50 from Penrith)

A1.6 No ticket check. Better route in Carlisle, avoiding the very congested old A6, using the A69 instead. No 2.6 destination label on the front. Coach (57 seater) quite full. No room for all wishing to board. Next coach announced as being in 15 minutes.

07.47 bus Kendal to Oxenholme.

A1.7 No information at Kendal regarding rail replacement. Adequate capacity, no ticket inspection. At Oxenholme congestion problems in car park used for RRBs. Misleading information on arrangements (VT/TPE contradictory). Dedicated staffing.

Coach Oxenholme – Lancaster (06.45 from Carlisle)

A1.8 Adequate capacity, no ticket inspection.

Arrangements at Lancaster.

A1.9 Lack of rail replacement information. Reported no on train PA announcement re RRBs on arriving train from Birmingham. Apparent shortage of coaches. A Carlisle passenger who should have changed at Preston.

Arrangements at Preston

A1.10 Two Boards at the top of platforms 3&4 pointing to rail replacement buses (but not platforms 5&6). Also PA announcements. Announcement heard on 08.00 Manchester Airport to Lancaster saying change for rail replacement services and detailing onward arrangements. Coaches observed only displayed green coach hire signs with numbers in black marker. 10.30 Euston – Lancaster - in train display showed destination Glasgow.

17.25 Lancaster – Oxenholme bus

A1.11 Adequate capacity, no ticket inspection. Lack of co-ordination between various companies' road replacement services e.g. passengers for Windermere (Northern RRS put on Oxenholme bus (TPE RRS) giving 30 minutes extra journey time.

18.15 Oxenholme to Kendal coach

A1.12 Adequate capacity, no ticket inspection. Incorrect stopping place at Kendal (non-local driver).

A2. Sunday 24th April**11.50 Oxenholme – Windermere coach (from Kendal to Staveley)**

A2.1 No information at Kendal station. Adequate capacity, no ticket inspection. No destination information on bus.

13.25 Windermere – Kendal (from Staveley)

A2.2 Information at Staveley not clear (no staff). 5 minutes walk from station to bus pick up point. Adequate capacity, no ticket inspection.

A3. Saturday 30th April**Arrangements at Carlisle**

A3.1 Much co-ordinated planning was evident, particularly with respect to the parking of buses in between turns in the very limited room available in the forecourt of Citadel station. There were again two queues – one for Lancaster/Preston (although the labelling only said Preston), and one for

Glasgow/Edinburgh (but again only Glasgow was given in the signage). These queues were somewhat confused as there were passengers for Appleby mixed in, who were called forward by VT staff. Passengers waiting were told that they could use the waiting room near platform 6, and that VT staff would then call them when ready for boarding of buses. The announcements on the station tannoy were for the remaining rail services.

A3.2 A noticeable difference from the previous week was the labelling of the buses provided by First for TPE. These had (a) a prominent notice stating that it was a Transpennine Express rail replacement bus; and (b) a destination label giving the calling points. The VT and NT buses (operated by Coach Services and Abellio respectively) continued only to have labels with large numbers displayed.

A3.3 The numbers using these bus services was small – very much reduced from those using the bus services last weekend. Most buses appeared to have between 5 and 15 passengers. The biggest volume of passengers passing through the station came from the three remaining rail services to/from Newcastle, Glasgow via Dumfries and Whitehaven/Barrow. Over 100 passengers came off the Scotrail train from Glasgow, and a number of passengers waiting in the bus queue for Glasgow asked if they could go on this train in preference to the bus, and then made their way to platform 7 for the train at 11:15.

10.10 Windermere – Lancaster coach

A3.4 Adequate capacity, no ticket inspection. “Rail replacement”

16.25 Lancaster – Oxenholme coach

A3.5 Adequate capacity, no ticket inspection. Destination shown

17.15 Oxenholme - Windermere coach (alighted Kendal)

A3.6 Adequate capacity, no ticket inspection. Destination shown.

A4. Saturday 7th May

09.25 Windermere – Oxenholme coach (from Kendal)

A4.1 Lack of information at Kendal station. Left 5 mins early. 2 passengers left behind. Adequate capacity, no ticket inspection. Destination shown.

08.45 Carlisle (from Oxenholme) coach to Lancaster

A4.2 Adequate capacity, no ticket inspection. Destination shown. Pram put in luggage space under coach.

17.25 Lancaster - Oxenholme coach

A4.3 Adequate capacity, no ticket inspection. Destination shown.

18.15 Oxenholme to Windermere coach (alighted at Kendal)

A4.4 The bus provided for this journey was a 17 seater mini bus with no luggage space. There were 8 passengers on this service from Oxenholme of

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which 3 or 4 had suitcases which had to be wedged here and there. This service was for Kendal and stations to Windermere. The passengers with luggage were for Kendal. 6 passengers left the mini bus at Kendal. A 57 seater was also going to Kendal then Windermere but all the Kendal passengers were put on the mini bus. The large coach was not full. No ticket inspection.

A5. Saturday 14th May

10.05 Bus Lancaster to Windermere.

A5.1 Clear PA announcement on train approaching Lancaster of available onward travel including directions to the buses. On arrival, plenty of station staff to assist passengers with good clear announcements from on-platform staff using hand-held devices linked to the PA system. Buses waiting outside the station exit with staff to guide passengers to the correct bus. No information on the front of the bus as to the route, but driver was informing passengers on boarding. Abellio staff did not board bus to confirm destination or inform passengers of the legal requirement to wear seat belts. No revenue protection.

A5.2 The bus was wholly unsuited to a rail replacement service. It had been a normal coach with about 50 seats plus a toilet. This layout had been removed (including the toilet) and seating for 70 passengers installed on a 3 + 2 pattern. These vehicles are normally used on school services and have a very cramped seating area with a narrow gangway. Many passengers were complaining about the lack of space. Staff were available at Windermere to help.

12.15 Bus Oxenholme to Windermere (to Kendal)

A5.3 This was a 17 seater mini bus with no destination display. There was adequate capacity but no space for luggage. Driver not identifiable as such – wearing jeans and tee shirt. No ticket inspection.

12.45 Coach Carlisle to Lancaster (from Penrith)

A5.4 The timetable showed an all stations service from Carlisle via Penrith and Oxenholme to Lancaster, but two vehicles were provided. One covering the above route, but a second running direct from Penrith to Lancaster. First staff boarded vehicle to announce where the coach was going and to advise about the wearing of seat belts. No destination shown on coach. Adequate capacity. No ticket inspection.

A6. Saturday 28th May

Observations at Oxenholme

A6.1 The 1010/15 buses all arrived and departed on time, fair number of passengers, no problems.

A6.2 1110/15 - all coaches arrived and departed, some leaving a few minutes late due to the volume of passengers. It was so busy that the Lancaster

standby coach arrived with a full load of passengers who disembarked and wanted the Windermere coaches. There were so many passengers for Windermere that the 50 seat Windermere only coach was full, the 27 seat all stations coach also full - the Northern standby coach was used to take the excess passengers, with some seats vacant for anyone wishing to board at Kendal, Burneside and Staveley. Overall, too many passengers for the scheduled coaches, but standby coaches used to move the remainder. All well handled by the supervisors.

A6.3 1210/1215 - the first coach to arrive was a Northern standby vehicle. The coaches arrived from Lancaster and two cycles were unloaded from the lockers and transferred to the Windermere coach. The southbound coaches were late. The supervisors were excellent, rather than make people wait and possibly miss their connections south, they quickly commandeered the TPE standby coach, loaded and off to Lancaster. A surveyor travelled on it.

A6.4 The Lancaster supervisors were excellent too. Coach driver told of a train arriving from the south in 5 minutes and Oxenholme and Windermere passengers were put on the coach. This freed up space on the scheduled coaches for Carlisle and made the Windermere connection easier. Excellent announcements made to the passengers.

A6.5 Back at Oxenholme, the 1500hrs wave of coaches arrived and departed without any problems. Several bikes noted being transferred between coaches.

A6.6 1610/1615 wave all OK. One slight criticism, a northbound coach was running between Lancaster and Carlisle, but confusingly with destination sheets for **both** Carlisle and Lancaster in the windscreen.

A6.7 1710/1715 wave all OK. 1810/1815 wave all OK, lots of passengers for Windermere. 1910/1915 and 2010/2015 waves all OK

A7. Sunday 29th May

10.48 Bus Windermere to Oxenholme (from Kendal)

A7.1 Poor information Kendal. Destination displayed on bus. Adequate capacity. No ticket inspection.

A7.2 Bus left Kendal 8 early. Driver said that there was a back-up one behind. The bus only had 6 empty seats leaving Kendal - 47 passengers on. Luggage compartment full with luggage. Back-up bus arrived at Oxenholme with another 38 passengers on with more luggage. This bus immediately returned to Windermere as there were excessive passengers. A busy day on the branch.

09.45 Coach Carlisle to Lancaster (from Oxenholme)

A7.3 Destination displayed. Adequate capacity. No ticket inspection. Two coaches were supplied for this service and both were needed as there were 112 passengers on 114 seats and about 100 items of luggage.

16.25 Coach Lancaster to Oxenholme

A7.4 Good signage to bus area at Lancaster from platform 4. PA well used and the directions on PA were clear. Destination displayed. Adequate capacity. No ticket inspection.

17.15 Oxenholme to Windermere (to Kendal)

A7.5 17 seater mini bus again with no destination display and no luggage space. 3 young ladies with rucksacks had to place them put down the middle of the aisle.

A7.6 The driver stopped some 50 yards from Kendal station and was going to let passengers disembark before being spotted by the co-ordinators who waved him down to the correct location. The driver had stopped at the correct location before as I had seen him before. No ticket inspection.