

promoting quality public transport.....

CONFERENCE REPORT

Thursday 9th February 2012
The Town Hall, Wigan
Conference kindly supported by First Bus

1. Welcome and Introduction

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

Consultation responses had been provided for:

- The National Planning Policy Framework
- Transport for Greater Manchester's Draft Rail Policy
- The Localism Act and its Implications for public transport

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

- House of Commons All Party Light Rail Group
- The Northern Hub (Network Rail)
- Salford Deaf Blind Group with Transport for Greater Manchester
- WCML franchise
- West Coast Rail 250
- Merseyside Integrated Transport Forum
- Merseyrail

Chris also referred to the Disrupted Rail Journeys report published late last year and the response received from many quarters. A meeting had been held at the request of Merseyrail to consider the issues raised on Merseyside with a view to finding solutions.

2. Welcome to Wigan

Cllr. Eunice Smethurst, Wigan MBC and Transport for Greater Manchester

Cllr. Smethurst welcomed delegates to Wigan and described public transport issues and initiatives in the Borough. She referred to the Wigan Strategic Transport Plan and the need to engage with neighbouring areas given the area's geographical position. She emphasised that public transport must be an important stratagem in all

new development plans and recognised the need for good links between transport hubs and to new housing and business estates to minimise road congestion. She emphasised the need for bus/rail integration and the need to promote the convenient interchange facilities between the 2 Wigan stations. She also mentioned progress with the Leigh guided busway and the opportunities it would offer to travellers.

3. North West Electrification and Northern Hub

David Golding, Programme Sponsor Electrification, Network Rail

Electric trains offer many advantages over diesel units as they are cheaper to run (fuel costs 50% lower) and carbon emission is reduced by 20% - 30% with no emissions at point of use. They provide a better reliability and performance and offer more seats, faster, quieter and smoother journeys, as well as reducing wear on track consequently reducing maintenance need.

The North West Electrification plan was first announced in July 2009 with the go-ahead confirmed in 2010. In 2011 the trans-Pennine link from Manchester via Leeds to York was added to the scheme. A variety of preparation work is required including clearances, low bridges and some of this has already commenced. The planned operational dates for completion of sections are:

- December 2013 – Manchester – West Coast Mainline via Newton le Willows
- December 2014 – Liverpool – Earlestown, Huyton and Wigan
- December 2015 – Preston – Blackpool
- December 2016 – Preston – Manchester

In the region of the Northern Hub, growth in passengers and freight movements is forecast to grow by 66% by 2029 so it is vital to upgrade the network. Economic targets of the Northern Way will force a requirement for faster and more frequent services between cities, access to airports and ports, and for anticipated increased commuting. It is expected that an additional 700 services will be required each day and these will enable the economy to grow by £4.2 billion. The first phase of government funding to include the Ordsall Chord is in place with the remainder to be confirmed in July which will include the upgrade of Manchester Victoria and extra platforms for the through lines at Manchester Piccadilly.

4. The Work of Bus Users UK

Gillian Merron, Chair

Bus Users UK was formed in 1945, as the National Federation of Bus Users, to answer a need for a voice of passengers as there was no statutory representation for them. It is a membership organisation with 35 local groups and is seeking more. It employs 3 full time and 1 part time staff and has now an associate member scheme for the bus industry. Most of its funding comes from bus operators.

Its main functions are:

- Complaint handling (800 per year)
- Encouragement of dialogue between passengers and operators
- Seeking a better partnership with bodies such as Passenger Focus

It is campaigning to improve the image of bus travel and to persuade operators to treat passengers as customers. As reliance on buses grows the industry has to meet the new challenge of less funding from Government and local authorities in subsidy to services and so more innovation and data resource about passenger needs are paramount. It is encouraging bus operators to enhance their understanding of customer requirements by improving complaint handling, as BUUK believes that the information gained forms exclusive feedback and should be viewed as an opportunity rather than a threat. BUUK believes that passenger input is vital for operators to properly plan their services in tune with the ever changing needs of potential customers and so encourages dialogue groups.

The car is still the biggest competitor to bus travel and so BUUK believes that any initiative to bridge the convenience gap should be pursued, particularly in the young traveller sector. In cities a large proportion of the workforce relies on buses to get them to and from work. BUUK is an advocate of the Senior's concessionary fare scheme for social inclusion factors and its promotion of modal shift.

It has a number of concerns that it feels the industry needs to address if it is to remove barriers to its development and can face up to a number of challenges of the immediate future. These include:

- Reliability (the No 1 issue)
- Frequency
- Availability of good and reliable information
- Publication of fares
- Stability of funding
- Good quality vehicles and service.

BUUK is keen to expand its operations to other parts of the UK and encourages bus users to form groups that will have the ability to lobby for better services and also provide useful feedback. Gillian will be pleased to hear from anyone wishing to pursue the formation of a local group and offers the help of BUUK in achieving it.

5. Rail Fares, Save our Buses, Roads and major infra - structure ***Sophie Allain, Campaign for Better Transport***

The Campaign for Better Transport (CBT) is a charitable organisation lobbying on a series of fronts, particularly sustainability. It seeks more local campaigners.

It has 3 main campaigns:

Fare Fares now – The UK's rail fares are the highest in Europe and a more innovative approach is sought with such initiatives as "Part Time" season tickets and more flexibility in group travel.

Save our Buses – CBT is concerned about bus service cuts as a result of a 27% cut in subsidies and a £100m reduction in the Senior’s concession pass scheme.

Roads to Nowhere – In December 2012 the government approved £900 million investment in road building. The campaign would prefer such investment to be spent on public transport to encourage modal shift.

6. Just a Minute Session

The “Just a Minute” session is designed 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:

- Poor and untidy state of Wigan Wallgate station (Northern to take back)
- Bus Operators losing out by poor compensation for concessionary scheme
- Inordinately long period of time for building HS2
- How does a “green government justify cuts in bus subsidies?
- Lack of consultation on withdrawal of Local Link Service (PF putting forward a tool kit for consultation on bus withdrawals with LTAs)
- Cost of bus fares/fare anomalies need regulation.

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. First Bus in Manchester

Jeff Clayton and David Leonard, Operations Managers

Jeff and David introduced the new company structure following a recent restructuring exercise. A key component was to devolve decision making to local managers. The company provides for 1.8 million journeys per year with 1900 drivers using 850 buses from 9 depots, covering route mileage of 670,000 per week. It has invested in 200 new vehicles in 2012 and provided new depots in Bolton and Wigan in 2004 and 2011 respectively.

First Bus is looking to improve its passenger care and is empowering local staff to actively engage with passengers. Major complaints about driver attitudes have fostered training initiatives on customer service & safety. A new Customer Care Line has been established and the data collected from customers using it forms a massive data resource that will be used in planning future policies and services.

The company is also embarking on a marketing campaign to try and attract new customers, in particular current non-bus users. This includes packaging fares with attractions admission, sight seeing buses, and promoting express services. It also continues its commitment to provide school buses.

New ticketing equipment is being installed on vehicles that automatically track the bus location by GPS to update fares as it proceeds on its journey. This also records data which is again added to the resource information bank.

However it is apparent that bus travel is flat-lining in its performance but a 1% modal shift from car to bus realises a 14% bus usage increase.

The company is investing heavily in staff development by coaching, mentoring, directional and graduate schemes and has also introduced a feedback system for operational staff as well as new electronic measuring system for driver monitoring.

8. Northern Community Ambassadors

Eddie Fisher, Project Manager, Northern Rail

This Ambassador scheme came about following a realisation that many communities served by the Northern route network were not using rail services and there was a need to reach out to them. Docklands Light railway has pioneered a similar scheme successfully in east London in recent years.

Pilots have been launched in Rochdale, Farnworth, Blackburn and Brierfield where Ambassadors have been recruited to engage with communities. They have strong local links, are multi lingual, and possess good communication skills. Initiatives have included:

- Open Days
- Talks to groups
- Surgeries with managers
- Experience trips for groups

Results have been encouraging with Burnley Central Station being adopted by local college students, a timetable amendment to cater for student travel times, and a "Friends" group at Farnworth. The scheme has engaged with over 4000 people and over 1000 have participated in experience trips resulting in numerous follow up group bookings.

Northern Rail is looking to expand the scheme to other areas in the future and will be monitoring feedback to further enhance relationships in communities.

9. Competition Commission's report on Local Bus Services

Paul Fawcett, TravelWatch North West

Currently the "Big 5" bus companies cover 69% of the market and their fares are 9% above the average. There is also concern that they have the ability to inflate tender prices if they so choose.

The Competition Commission has published the final report into findings. It has been silent on franchising, which represents a massive U-turn on its previous statements but comes up with a 7 point plan:

- Multi Operator Ticketing – seen as a key remedy, LTAs needing added powers to make ticketing schemes (why not use T. Act 2000?)
- A Code of Practice – to cover overbussing, anti-competitive practices, predatory pricing, tactical deregistrations (but Traffic Commissioners’ powers in T. Act 1985 ignored)
- Bus stations – fair, reasonable & non-discriminatory (T. Act 1985, Section 83 ignored)
- Supported Services – covering tactical deregistrations, inflated tenders, ownership of financial and operating data, fares transparency
- Competition enforcement – OFT should have effective merger control and the size “trigger” for investigation should be lowered.
- Partnerships – a risk that Quality Partnerships/ Contracts might prevent use of lower but “adequate” quality services
- BSOG – should incentivise compliance with competition regulations, multi operator ticketing, and investment in Quality Partnerships

Paul concluded that the findings were a mix of useful and impractical measures, largely ignoring existing statutory powers. The Competition Commission did not appear to understand the bus industry and its competitors (car, train, tram and taxi).

10. Next Conference - Thursday 14th June, 2012 in Blackpool – planned to include an optional visit to the new Blackpool tram depot at Starr Gate!

Attendance

Name	Organisation
Adrian Dunning	NW Transport Roundtable
Alan Gaskell	Stagecoach Manchester
Barry King	
Beverley Gallier	Transport for Greater Manchester
Chris Dale	TravelWatch NorthWest
Chris Jarvis	Institute of Transport Administration
Cllr Eunice Smethurst	Transport for Greater Manchester
Colin Barnett	Bus Users UK
Craig Harrop	Northern Rail Ltd
David Beer	Passenger Focus
David Butterworth	TravelWatch NorthWest
David Evans	Blackpool & Fylde RUA
David Golding	Network Rail
David Koring	Shropshire Council
David Leonard	First Bus Manchester
David Thrower	

Eddie Fisher	Northern Rail Ltd
Fred Consterdine	Crewe & Shrewsbury Passr Ass.
Gabriel Drew	East Cheshire RUG
Geoff Kerr	
Gillian Merron	Bus Users UK
Ian Boyd	Halton Borough Council
Janet Cuff	Ramblers Association
Jeff Clayton	First Bus Manchester
Jeremy Walker	Blackpool Council
Joan Hurst	
John Moorhouse	TravelWatch NorthWest
John Aaron	
John Culshaw	Mattersons Cranes
John Owen	TravelWatch NorthWest
John Ryan	Wirral Transport Users Association
June Chadwick	
Ken Swallow	CILT North West
Lillian Burns	TravelWatch NorthWest
Malcolm Richardson	Blackpool & Fylde RUA
Martin Robinson	Arriva North West
Michael Wrigley	STORM
Neil Caldwell	CILT North West
Paul Fawcett	TravelWatch NorthWest
Peter Colley	Kendal & District Bus Users
Peter Foster	Sustrans
Peter Johnston	
Peter Lamkin	Wrexham Birkenhead RUA
Phillipa Sudlow	Confederation of Passenger Transport
Preva Crossley	Friends of Hindley Station
Roger Barton	Goyt Valley Rail Users Assoc.
Russell Oakes	CILT Merseyside & Warrington
Russell Warhurst	University of Chester
Sandra Dutson	RoadPeace NW
Sheila Dee	Chester-Shrewsbury Rail Partnership
Sophie Allain	Campaign for Better Transport
Stephen Clapham	Friends of Eccles Station
Steven Jones	Lancashire CPRE
Tom Lunt	
Tony Fawthrop	GM Transport Campaign
Tony Potts	Copeland RUG
Tony Young	TravelWatch NorthWest