

Wirral Transport User

WINTER 2012

NEWSLETTER OF THE WTUA

ISSUE ONE 2012



*Some of the items
featured in this
issue*

WTUA looks at local transport issues

WIRRAL TRANSPORT USERS ASSOCIATION

WELCOMES YOU TO A NEW YEAR AND A NEW TITLE FOR OUR NEWSLETTER. WE FEEL IT IS BOTH SHORTER AND MORE APPROPRIATE.

Looking back over the last 12 months a major success has been the

introduction of a quarter hourly Merseyrail service between Liverpool, Birkenhead and Chester.

Introduced just before Christmas last year, as a traveller, you can't help but notice that the line has become very busy for both destinations. In the Liverpool direction, combined with the service from Ellesmere Port gives us 6 trains an hour to Birkenhead & Liverpool and back.



Looking Back

One can hardly remember back to 1978 when the service was half hourly with diesel units as far as Rock Ferry where one had to change to the electric train for Liverpool.

Plans to close every station between Rock Ferry and Chester, apart from Bromborough, were announced. That was when the peasants revolted and our organisation was formed. It was then known as the Bebington Rail Action Group (BRAG). The rest is history. With the support of Merseytravel and Merseyrail Electrics the Liverpool Area has one of the most frequent and best performing railways in the country.

What we still wait for is a better service on the Bidston - Wrexham Line with at least a half hourly service and the eventual electrification or, at least, electro diesels that can be integrated into the Merseyrail Electrics service.

Excellent public transport links help the success of Liverpool. Liverpool has changed a lot in the last

OVER 50% OF
TRAVELLERS TO
LIVERPOOL USE
PUBLIC
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decade. 10 years ago there were about 46 acres of preserved bomb sites. This has now become Liverpool ONE with 26 million visitors a year. No out of town shopping centre has such excellent public transport provision. Wirral & Northern Lines of Merseyrail Electrics provide 38 trains an hour into and out of Liverpool stations. There is also plenty of car parking provision which has also helped in its appeal.

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The latest on the Llangollen Railway Extension
Start of the extension from Carrog to Corwen:-
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A Glance at the Transport Scene John Mitchell

Osborne's sudden second thoughts on the state of UK's economy, sounding like a Plan "B" to me, suggest public transport may be about to benefit considerably. News carried by the railway journals indicates the industry is ready with projects across the country especially in the Midlands and North, the sooner the better.

Wirral travellers venturing across the Mersey or south to Chester will already have experienced improved service. The North West and Trans-Pennine are due radical modernisation in electrification and some relief to the system under strain from overcrowding by extensive rejigging of the Northern Hub (Greater Manchester and beyond).

Advocates of the HS2 proposals are showing increasing impatience with those who continue to protest against it, who stress the enormous cost, the damage to the countryside and the few places that will benefit from it (at the expense of much needed improvements locally). Meanwhile those who are for it see it as a catalyst for growth in the economy, seemingly ignoring the calamity of the bankers' wholesale mismanagement and consequent economic stagnation. There is the risk HS2+ may turn out to be poor judgement all round. The optimists believe the present difficulties will pass and the future will be bright. The debate continues.

Railway buffs should be reminded the majority of people do not travel by rail. Whilst the overall cost of running the family car has become an increasing burden on household budgets; a cheaper alternative would be coach not train. However superior travel by train may become, for the majority it may be too remote and expensive. Before the Second World War rail companies offered cheap day, half-day and evening trips. Nowadays bus travel is not cheap and frequency and availability reduced. Older people suffer from service that is not guaranteed. Sadly, evening services are becoming a thing of the past making the struggle to reach public events out of the question.

DEVELOPMENT OF UNDERGROUND STATIONS

Because of the big rise in numbers of people using the Liverpool Underground Stations congestion is increasing and could get to dangerous levels, the existing stations are being improved which will mean closures at different times over the next 18 months or so for work to take place. Work is funded by Merseytravel & the European Regional Development Fund (RDF).

CENTRAL AREA UNDERGROUND STATION CLOSURES – UNDERGROUND RENEWAL PLAN

LIVERPOOL CENTRAL

Northern Line Platforms closed 23.4.12 to 21.10.12

Wirral Line Platform closed 23.4.12 to 23.8.12

Trains will pass through non-stop.

Work covers full refurbishment of the Concourse Area, an additional lift, new escalators to the Northern Line, larger platforms and improved toilets.

JAMES STREET

Platform 1 closed 2.8.12 to 5.1.13 Platform 3 closed 6.1.13 to 20.4.13

Trains will pass through non-stop

LIME STREET DEEP LEVEL

Platform closed 21.4.13 to 20.8.13

Trains will run through non-stop

MOORFIELDS & HAMILTON SQUARE

To be announced in a future programme

1. CHESTER STATION

These planned works overseen by Chester Renaissance are now largely complete and the new split staircase together with other facilities on the far island platform, are very welcome. This leaves the station approaches, parking and the former Chester Enterprise Centre (Ex. NCL Goods Shed), devastated by fire. There are plans for redevelopment and hopefully this will be connected to the station thereby benefitting Hoole and the station.

The free Rail Link Bus to the City Centre funded jointly by the Council and Train Operating Companies had to be withdrawn in November due to an 'application for a commercial service'. This is now costing the Council £100,000 p.a. in Concessionary Fares compared to £38,000 p.a. for the free bus. Non-pass holders pay £1 each way. So a service introduced as incentive to travel by train to Chester now does just the opposite except for pass holders. The rules of Bus Deregulation are to blame!

2. DECEMBER TRAIN TIMETABLE CHANGES

The success of extra daytime (after 9.00) train services between Chester and Liverpool and vice versa started in December 2010 has been followed by two extra early services to Chester arriving 8.38 and 9.06. Merseyrail Sunday services still miss the first trains to Manchester (8.41) and London (8.40) as trains for 8.00 and 8.30 departures come in empty. An arrival at 8.26 would be ideal.

It will be interesting to see the effect on passenger numbers but they may be limited by lack of parking spaces at Chester and Bache. The multi storey car park proposal for Chester was turned down and Morrisons has refused to release more car parking for Bache.

A recent day trip from Bache to Ellesmere Port highlighted the improvements to the Chester – Liverpool daytime services. It is possible to catch the xx35 or xx05 services from Bache to Hooton and with a short wait arrive in only 25 minutes. Returning is the same. For Railcard holders it is only £2.60 return, others £3.90.

Other services are mainly the same but check at the weekends as some services are affected by electrification or other engineering work. Chester – Crewe does not seem now to be an early candidate for electrification as it is expected to be omitted from the new West Coast Franchise which is expected to last fifteen years from December.

3. TRAIN FARES

Train fares went up in January as usual, this time restricted to RPI + 1% (6.2% average). This only applies to regulated fares such as commuting fares, singles, off-peak and season tickets. One of the highest rises in the country was apparently the peak return fare now £10.40 from Chester to Crewe at 10.6%. Chester to Liverpool is the same fare but only a rise of 7.2%.

For low earners these rises are a problem. And still the same trains !

On the other hand an off-peak return from Bache to Port Sunlight only went up by 1%.

4. METROLINK COULD COME TO CHESTER

Cheshire East Council have launched a feasibility study into a Metrolink extension as part of its Local Transport Plan. This would require trams to run as trains on the Mid-Cheshire Line from Altrincham towards Chester. A more frequent service could result with trams joining the existing Altrincham to Manchester City Centre service.

5. HALTON CURVE – Upgrading the link between Frodsham and Runcorn.

We wait to see if this is accepted for CP5 (2013-9) to be announced this Summer. Reintroduction of a train service on this route would give access to Liverpool South Parkway for Liverpool Airport from Chester and North Wales or Frodsham to Liverpool for example. At present getting to Liverpool Airport from Chester requires a cheap but complicated journey via Liverpool city centre.



Your Chance to Lease & Operate a Tramway- if you have a few pounds to spare!

Wirral Borough Council has put the Birkenhead Tramway up for leasing together with the associated Wirral Transport Museum. Pacific Road Arts & Exhibition Centre. There is no obligation to run the Pacific Road Theatre but any bid to retain this use would be welcomed.

There is the opportunity to improve the display of museum contents and operate the tramway. The successful bidder must engage and involve community and voluntary groups in operation of the Museum & Tramway. All three parts of the area must be leased together (ie Tramway, Museum and Pacific Road Exhibition Centre). The contract is available for up to the year 2048 but can be for a minimum of 10 years from April this year. It will be up to the successful bidder to generate an income in order to sustain the facilities. The tramway is very much part of Wirral's heritage.

You will remember that Merseytravel were intending to take it over and extend it to Seacombe & Birkenhead park as part of their tourist strategy. This was eventually turned down by the politicians on the MTA which has set back plans. That is why the area is being put up for lease again.

The Transport Museum & Tramway were originally developed by Wirral Borough Council in the early 1990s. It was to do with Birkenhead's connection with the first purpose designed tramway in the country which was established here in 1860. The 150 year anniversary was celebrated on 30 August 2010. (See photos). The current tramway was intended to go to Birkenhead Park, the original 1860 terminus, via Europa Boulevard. In fact the central reservation of this road was constructed with foundations to take the tramway. Very little money, if any, has been spent to promote the tramway. Most people in the Merseyside area have never heard of it. The tramway is lucky if it gets 20,000 passenger a year. By contrast, the National Tramway Museum at Crich, in the middle of the countryside attracts up to 200,000 passenger a year. Ours, in the middle of a major conurbation should be able to achieve least that. It is very well served by public transport. Train: (18 trains an hour each way through Hamilton Square Station), Ferry & Bus. The annual Bus & Tram show attracts hundreds of people. A number of special events like this throughout the year would be a success with good promotion. It could be used as a test bed for new trams as it was a few years ago by Prof Lewis Lesley's City Tram from Trampower.

Tram decorated for 150 years event.

Mayor of Wirral studies old terminus at the park. Rob Jones of MTPS displays 1860 photo.



COMMUNITY RAIL AT ELLESMERE PORT STATION

In the Summer of 2010 Cheshire West & Chester Council working with Merseyrail thought it would be good to generate some community interest in Ellesmere Port Station in order to change negative perceptions of the station by some passengers and residents. And so in August 2010 a press release was sent to local papers asking for volunteers to come forward.



Several interested residents got in touch and the council also received a phone call from a local company keen to become friends of the station. Veolia Environmental Services said they would like to do a Corporate Social Responsibility Day and were volunteering their management team to come and do some gardening.

At the same time that Veolia came forward some more would be friends made contact – Ellesmere Port Street Pastors – church volunteers who give their time to community projects said they would like to get involved in litter picking and gardening at the station on a monthly basis.

The existing gardens at the station were 2 very worn patches of grass - Veolia agreed that they would come and transform both gardens so the day to day station friends could maintain them and develop them. Veolia staff volunteers freely gave their time and company resources.

Since Veolia's initial work local residents who are Station Friends have planted more shrubs and the gardens are weeded and tended on a weekly if not daily basis by them with station staff also getting involved. Recycled concrete planters have been re-sited at the station and planted up by the Friends to add to the colourful displays.

The Station Gardens have also been enhanced by the artwork painted by young people from the local High School and local landmarks painted by one of the adult Friends. The Ellesmere Port Station Garden project has been really successful because there are so many different partners who are Friends of the Station: residents, Merseyrail, the Council, Veolia Environmental Services, the High School and the local primary school and the street pastors – each group is doing their bit to brighten the station and make sure the gardens are bright, colourful and well tended. The project has been successful because it has been achieved without an allocated budget.

Passengers waiting to catch the Merseyrail train now have a pleasanter, prettier place to wait, a station where people now feel safer than they did before the gardens were transformed.

Sally Buttifant - Community Rail Officer
Mid Cheshire Line Cheshire West & Chester Council



Corwen Extension Project Pushes Ahead

With the considerable number of preliminaries for the environmental requirements finalised, the Llangollen Railway is now able to push on with the extension of the railway towards the half way point at Bonwm.

The need now is for the Railway's volunteers to make a concerted effort to join in at ground level and primarily help to lay track. With no trains running during January, volunteers are being asked to commit to spending time on the extension and there is a variety of work to be undertaken for the skilled and unskilled.

The end of the bird nesting season saw tree cutting and vegetation clearance restart working from Bonwm Halt towards Carrog. However, there is still a massive amount of work to do and current efforts are concentrated in the area of Bonwm close by the A5 access point. The effort calls for working on weekdays with groups of two or more tackling bushes and lineside vegetation.

There is still some fencing work to be done under supervision to complete the railway's boundary line with work now being undertaken to the west of Bonwm.

Remember the birds come back in April!

The track is laid for 400 metres west of the sheep gate at Carrog past the public footpath access point and a further 400 metres of trackbed is ballasted and ready to receive sleepers and rails - but the challenge is to complete the further 1100 metres beyond that point to the area of Bonwm Halt. New and refurbished drainage has been completed and the long neglected trackbed infrastructure is drying out nicely. Remember it has been derelict for nearly half a century!

There is a need to build up a regular weekend team of eight people to continue the laying of track through to the end of March. In support of them a weekday team of professionals and volunteers is needed to select and sort matching pairs of rails and undertake preparatory work and positioning sleepers ready for the weekend effort.

A Works Train is being assembled and will be on site to provide engineering support along with a road-railer together with the tractor and trailer to aid the work.

Staff facilities are now installed at a works centre near Bonwm for use by the track gangs.

Volunteers willing to get involved in any of these options are welcome but, for insurance purposes, must be paid-up members of Llangollen Railway Trust Ltd and possess a PTS - Personal Track Safety certificate – which can be provided on completion of a basic examination of trackside knowledge based on the LR's Rule Book.

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Those who turn out to help are asked to bring their own packed lunch and warm drink, as well as waterproof clothing at this time of year. The volunteer hours input to the project count towards the matched funding requirements and worksheets are available for signing on.

The Corwen Extension Appeal Fund, as promoted by Llangollen Railway Trust Ltd, has now reached £80K with a further £60K needed to meet the target for Phase 1 matched funding. Gift aided donations to the Trust are very welcome from those who wish to see the train arrive in Corwen in early 2013 and money received is acknowledged with a suitable certificate in the donor's name. A donation form is available on request from the Llangollen Railway office – 01978 860979.

For additional information please contact: Trust Membership Secretary Graham Hoyland on 01745 832796 or mobile: 0777 88173576

Merseyrail Chester Line Six-Car Trains

Running 6-car trains presents a problem particularly at Birkenhead Central where both platforms in use are too short. Work to extend them started before Christmas 2011 but has been somewhat dilatory to date. One feels under present economic circumstances Network Rail would be keen to show the travelling public more enthusiasm for the job. Apparently neither Class 507 nor Class 508 rolling stock is equipped with SDO.[Selective Door Opening]. This is therefore very much a safety issue but has equal relevance to the aim to operate without exceptions.

RAIL EXCURSIONS

Two Rail Excursions are being run this spring time by local groups.

The WAVERLEY EXPRESS will operate on Saturday 21st April picking up at Hooton about 7.20am. Running to Edinburgh via the Cumbrian Fells & Scottish Borders giving just over 4 hours in Edinburgh. Fares from £63 with child fares.

This is being run by the Ffestiniog Railway Dee & Mersey Group & Chester Model Railway Club. Details from L J Wheeler on 01244 678070

The LINCOLNSHIRE POACHER will run on Saturday 5th May starting from Chester at 6.35am. There is a choice of destinations, Lincoln, Wainfleet for a visit to Bateman's Brewery or the bracing seaside resort of Skegness. About 4 to 5 hours at each place. This is organised by the Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association.

Details from John Hanson 0161 283 3384 Fares from £53 with child reductions.

What about our own excursions? We usually run one or two. Is there demand for another visit to the Welsh Highland Railway which is now complete between Caernarfon & Porthmadog? We haven't been to the Welshpool & Llanfair for some years or the East Lancs or the Lakeside Railway with a sail on Windermere. Let us know what you think.

HIGH SPEED WIRRAL

The public timetable allows 1 minute from Bidston to Upton on the Wrexham Line. The distance is 3Km. This gives a start to stop speed of about 112 miles per hour!

LITTLE SUTTON STATION

Local residents in Little Sutton have been watching developments at Ellesmere Port Station and have expressed an interest in starting a Friends group at their station. To generate further interest Little Sutton residents past and present and the people who were on the staff spent two hours sharing their stories, photographs and memories of the station. One ex resident even sent in his memories of the station by email from Canada where he now lives.

One local resident – Tina - was born in the station as her father Jack was station master in the 1930s. Tina brought along photos of her and her parents on the platform at Little Sutton and discovered a photo of herself at the station in one of the local history books.

The last Station Master at Little Sutton, Roy Royles, also came along with press releases highlighting the award winning gardens at the station in the 60s. Since the memories coffee morning Little Sutton Friends have planted pansies and polyanthus in new planters at the station.

To find out more about volunteering at Cheshire West stations contact Sally on 01244 976788.

PEOPLE

A number of changes have recently taken place at the top in the local transport scene.

Managing Director of Merseyrail Electrics, Bart Schmeink, has left for a new job running Amsterdam's transport system which carries 1 million passengers a day. This covers responsibility for Trams, Metro, Buses & Ferries. We welcome Marten Spaargarten, in his place. He was previously involved in high speed rail in the Netherlands.

Merseytravel's Chief Executive & Director General, Neil Scales, has left for warmer climes at this time of the year. He will be a great loss after 15 years in the job with many achievements on the Merseyside travel scene. He is to be responsible for running Brisbane's transport system in Australia. His replacement, Jim Barclay, in an acting capacity, is currently Director of Resources who has been involved for many years and has a good knowledge of our transport needs.

We wish all these gentlemen well in their new capacities