

Connexion

Issue 138 October 2016

OPSTA

the ormskirk, preston & southport travellers' association

web site - www.opsta.org twitter - @opsta15



The scene is the infamous “Hogwarts” platform 3C at Preston at just after 1pm on Sunday 28th August. The headboards say ‘Ormskirk’ on an unusually long train for this line formed of the visible Class153 coupled to a 150. The train information screen just off picture shows a 13.35 departure. Read the story of this eventful day inside.

NORTHERN TO MEET OPSTA IN BURSCOUGH ON NOVEMBER 14TH

Our next general meeting will be held in the afternoon and our guests will be Sharon Keith Northern’s Regional Director West and members of her management team. Details on Page 4.



This eye catching banner on the road bridge at Croston says it all.

Promotion of the event locally in Croston by Kath Almond and in Rufford by Rose Oley made a telling impact on passenger numbers.

Community Rail Lancashire also produced a striking full size poster showing the timetable that went up at stations on the West and East Lancs lines.

Special Sunday Service in support of Motorfest 28th August

It had been a long time since we had seen a Sunday service on the Preston-Ormskirk line, however the Community Rail Partnership had agreed to pursue opportunities for one off, event-driven Sunday services that might be viable.

OPSTA proposed and Northern agreed to operate this service at its cost and without any subsidy or support funding on the basis that the Motorfest event would drive passenger levels over 300 which in simple terms would cover the cost of a single shift operation.

Northern allocated a 3 car train to a timetable comprising 5 return services starting at 10.15 with the final return service to depart Ormskirk at 16.52.

Through the efforts of a number of our regular volunteers, OPSTA supported proceedings actively and conducted passenger counts and surveys. We collected data on level of demand, reasons for travel, and journeys made in order to assess whether the service was a success and inform the case for Sunday services.

Now reduced to a 2 car train, this was the delayed 13.35 departure from Preston picking up at Croston.

On time it would have carried 85 or more passengers.



Story of the day

It was a grey morning but there was a buzz at Croston station with the first train on time to pick up 14 passengers looking forward to the event. Ok there were just 4 already on board but it was a well presented train with the 150 and 153 units corridor-connected and a cheery, enthusiastic Guard - it was a promising start.

With all passengers happy to take the survey, we were soon arriving at Rufford to see just two people on the platform, the Signaller and Roger Bell, no passengers. Roger conveyed the bad news, the second service cancelled and having heard this, the waiting passengers lost confidence there would be a return service later and went away. Still a good number at Burscough Junction kept us busy conducting surveys and brought the loading up to 30.

By Ormskirk our Guard had been informed that on return to Preston the driver was reassigned to cover a regular service. With an immediate turnaround a snap decision was taken on changing our rota and who would take the return service. Unbeknownst to us Northern arranged a replacement bus service which as it turned out did not run too far behind the train schedule. It was not communicated to anyone other than those looking to board at Preston, oblivious until too late, we missed it.

Kath Almond on duty at Croston with her Friends-of-station colleagues and knowing many were turning up for the second service had the presence of mind to check and make all waiting aware. One quipped 'but there are no buses on a Sunday'.

Unfortunately, there were further operational issues with adverse impact on the numbers carried. The third service due to depart Preston at 13.35 finally left 35 minutes late after the failed 153 unit was decoupled. After this all of the services ran but despite efforts to recover time, none was less than 20 minutes behind schedule.

The day in numbers

From the counts and data gathered we can be certain that at least 174 passengers (individuals) used the service plus another 70 arrived at platform but did not wait. 167 passengers were surveyed and this has yielded some very useful data on general travel demand and patterns.

- On the day over 100 travelled for non-event reasons
- The reason for travel was predominantly social/leisure purposes but 3% said work
- It was widely commented that there was no bus service or the traveller preferred to avoid car use; many were not car owners or had no access to a car.

What next?

Northern has committed to put the service on again for Motorfest 2017.

OPSTA will make the case to Northern and CRP, and press for other one offs with Burscough Parish Council already offering some conditional financial support.

And the best rumour of the day was that Northern is already planning to run Sunday services in the future. Who wishes to raise that question on 14th November?

Alan Fantom

Notes: Our survey report will be available on the website or by request. Ian Cannon fed back to Northern the experience of one unable to travel due to cancellation. Northern explained how they normally have sufficient covering crew and apologised.

General Meeting with Northern 14th November at 13.30

I am delighted to announce Northern's management team for their West region (our area) led by Sharon Keith, Director has agreed to meet with us. She will be accompanied by Craig Harrop, Stakeholder & Relationship Manager who we have worked with for many years, and Graeme Follin, Head of Trains and Stations.

The last time we held an afternoon meeting was when Network Rail visited us in Burscough, it had a good attendance and went very well.

This time it is a new venue, the Blue Mallard at Burscough Wharf which is a super setting, spacious and refreshment will be available throughout the afternoon.

Although it is an open meeting and we are not limited on numbers I do need to make it an rsvp event. So please ensure you let me know if you wish to attend.

Provisional Agenda

- Introductions
- Northern's vision / service development plan for this region
- OPSTA overview: who we are, our priorities and how we aim to work with rail companies/ authorities
- Preston-Ormskirk-Liverpool: timetable plans, latent demand and how line potential might be realised/ growing passenger numbers.
- Southport-Manchester routes: after the Piccadilly issue the key question for OPSTA is how Northern will manage it as a route given the regional structure. Also aim to cover opportunities and requirements in terms of service frequency/ calling patterns/ station facilities; Burscough Bridge Ticket Office; "Electrification"
- Kirkby-Wigan: at this point does it feature in Northern's thinking?
- Questions, Next Steps (working together) and close

If you wish to have a matter raised not covered by this agenda please inform me. The formal meeting will last 2 hours and close at 15.30 but there will be time for some OPSTA only questions and discussions after this.

Alan Fantom

Venue Details

The Blue Mallard, Burscough Wharf, Liverpool Road North, L40 5RZ

Telephone: 01704 893954 Website: www.thebluemallard.co.uk

There is a car park to the rear of the Wharf and it is an easy walk from both Burscough Bridge and Junction stations (10 minutes max).

The meeting will be on the first floor and can be accessed by either lift or stairs.

The Campaign for direct services to the south of Manchester

If this was a horse race it would be the Grand National, a long course with a lot of high fences to get over and just when you have got round the course once you have to go round it again. So where are we? Having been declared a non-starter many times, we are now in the running 3 or 4 fences out; nothing is certain but our case rides on a strong steed and our backing grows.

Continuing my reportage, here is the last 4 months ...

On **1st July** the four MPs for Southport, West Lancs, Wigan and Makerfield, representatives from local authorities, Lancashire County Council, Merseytravel, OPSTA and SRTF met with Northern (the train operator, Arriva Rail North) and Rail North (transport authority). A positive outcome was sought in which both services to Victoria and Piccadilly are retained and even improved.

The MPs had set aside time specifically to work with rail managers to find a solution that would retain rail services for their constituents, were left visibly infuriated and frustrated when the train operator came across as having no real intention of finding a way of saving the Piccadilly-Airport link from being axed in December 2017. "We have a commercial contract with DfT" was the blunt justification for this position which seemed to belie previous statements made by many that this requirement would be considered when the service proposition in the winning franchise bid was made known. In response to the major concern expressed by travellers over the time loss and uncertainty in making a rail connection, especially at busy peak periods at Salford Crescent; "it will be all right", "it will not be a problem".

A lot more was covered and in fairness afterwards, Northern said the meeting had not gone well and insisted they were working on options.

Both Lancashire County Council and, following a motion from Sefton MBC that was passed, Liverpool City Region Combined Authority seeks the retention of our services on economic grounds; Merseytravel wrote to Rail North to confirm this. Disappointingly Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) has continued to re-iterate the same non-committal position previously given to MPs and passengers.

Early **August** saw the main follow up action from the meeting with MPs when Eric Woodcock SRTF and I met with Northern and Rail North. Although there was no breakthrough, we were at last having a meaningful and constructive dialogue with the right people (in contrast to July 1st) in the right forum.

It was clear that the data collated from our counts and surveys and communications from both passengers and other bodies, eg councils, had made an impression. A more detailed analysis of travel patterns; breaking down how the 850 commuters and hundreds of others depend on the service daily; was supplied to Northern who agreed to keep looking for feasible options for service provision.

Northern /Rail North asked us to work with them on a further passenger survey to build on our previous work and establish by post code the precise location passengers are travelling to, eg place of work. We agreed confident it would prove our case and if it helps build credibility then it will be a constructive step.

We established that a solution appears possible without detriment to any other service. Current planning has an hourly path provisionally allocated to a Bolton

electric service which should be switched to a diesel (or hybrid) service running between Southport and Piccadilly via Westhoughton/ Bolton.

Northern face many rail issues and constraints that make timetable planning challenging such as delays to electrification and national rolling stock cascades (don't read this as misplaced sympathy) but maintained "within this process opportunities for providing a through service from the Southport line to south Manchester were being sought".

Interestingly Rail North and Northern remarked on the value and importance of continued MP involvement with consensus that there must be a political will, notably within the Department for Transport, which is why it is so important that we have the 5 MPs whose constituencies run along the line from Southport to Westhoughton raising this issue. Following an approach by the Friends of Westhoughton, Bolton West MP Chris Green was already committed to getting this resolved. Moreover, South Ribble MP Seema Kennedy maintains a close interest.

Briefed and supported by the campaign team, 'our' MPs met with the new Rail Minister, North West MP Paul Maynard on **6th September** and were encouraged by his understanding of the issues and stated desire for a workable solution to be found. He commented that the Department for Transport (DfT) may need to revise its Service Specification (TSR) and utilisation targets for electrified lines (eg Bolton corridor) in order to facilitate this.

Despite this, however, Northern outwardly appears non-committal stating they will review options with us in **October** after they have the results and findings from their passenger survey conducted on 28th September. The research company has indicated they got a good response (from a much smaller sample base than our surveys) so it should mean that the data we have collated and presented is verified and supported from an independent source.

The online petition set up by Wigan MP Lisa Nandy in order to demonstrate how many members of the travelling public will be adversely affected has over 1500 signatures - <https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/defend-rail-services-in-to-manchester-piccadilly>.

We know Northern has some cost and rolling stock availability concerns but the perceived hurdle that DfT will object to changes to the franchised service seems to have been cleared so what (or who) stands in the way?

I finally closed this newsletter for press on 23rd October so where are we?

The passenger survey report from the independent research company has just been circulated and that will be worked through now. From the summary it appears that the findings align with our own and thus corroborates the data and evidence we have submitted previously¹.

Northern has arranged a meeting for 21st November (re convened August 2nd group) in order to review service options in the light of the survey findings. Northern has given no indication of what services it considers feasible to deliver.

Alan Fantom

1. Cognizance is required (by all) that the campaign group (OPSTA, SRTF & NWMSA) surveyed all services in the morning peak period which includes 5 to Piccadilly/Airport and this survey was conducted on the 3 main Picc/Airport services.

Southport – Manchester Services today

While we fight for the future of our services, what we get from Northern today isn't yet looking much different to services under the previous franchise, having gone through the regular May and October timetable updates. I would suggest that even the anticipated degradation of allocated rolling stock due to cascades going into reverse hasn't been that apparent, perhaps some credit is due to Northern here.

From our observation and reporting, **Fare Collection** remains inconsistent although Northern will point out that ticket barriers have been implemented at Wigan Wallgate and Salford Crescent. Moreover, Northern has also informed that more Additional Fare Collectors (AFCs) have been recruited and there is a planned roll-out of a new multi-functional ticketing device to Guards. Don't hesitate to call in or email (opstafares@gmail.com) your observations of on board services.

Also stated in Northern's recent update, the proposal for **Station Improvement**, a commitment under the new franchise, has been submitted for approval and sign-off by the DfT. Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs) will be installed at most stations on both lines and it is claimed they will offer the "full range of tickets".

Not a situation of the operator's making but the pending introduction of a TVM may have a bearing on their position, a sorely missed service is the **Burscough Bridge Booking Office**.



Colin Wareing captured the poignant scene as Phil is close to finishing the last shift at the ticket office – it closed at 16.00 on 25th June 2016.

Phil and his colleague Deb were very popular because they provided a much valued and human service which is sorely missed by the Burscough **community**.

Furthermore, what has been the revenue impact for Northern since closure?

What are the prospects of us getting some form of ticket office re-opened?

Lancashire County Council (LCC) has still to receive any firm proposal and bid for the building to be taken over despite having received many expressions of interest.

An initiative by Burscough Moving Forward (BMF), led by Roger Bell, to construct a business plan that included a ticket office was in effect thwarted by circumstances and having concluded it cannot create a viable concern, BMF withdrew.

Although Community Rail Lancashire remains interested in the possibility of sharing the building space with others, given compatibility of uses, it appears not to be in the gift of the Community Rail Partnership to take a lead on this. There may, however, access to some community rail funding to support any bid.

At this point that leaves Burscough Parish Council as the only body seeking a future for the building albeit it is OPSTA's understanding that the ticket office does not form a part of any envisaged use.

I must be candid, while OPSTA has stated its support for the ticket office, pledged to hire meeting facilities as a modest contribution to the building's revenue, raised awareness and encouraged others, we have not engaged in formal discussions with the Parish Council or any other party. The reason why not is simply down to the time and effort dedicated to the Piccadilly campaign.

That said dialogue will be taking place with both Northern and the Parish Council.

OPSTA was also asked to intervene on the pending removal of the **cycle lockers**; use of the facility had been withdrawn and LCC has stated it needs to dispose of this asset because it is now a liability. Despite an offer of local volunteer management of the facility, Northern has said it cannot take ownership, however, has offered to work with OPSTA and look into an alternative offering.

What about the Curves?

Connection of the Southport-Manchester and Preston-Liverpool lines was again confirmed at our AGM as one of our key priorities, and yet the question is often, justifiably raised as to what is being done about it.

To recap, OPSTA has in recent times taken measures to ensure this is included in both the County Council's Transport Masterplan for West Lancashire and the City Region's Long Term Rail Strategy but neither of those bodies is actively studying the matter. Nor is OPSTA but be assured we are amassing travel demand data as a product of working with others and our research and analysis.

With the Government's Transport Secretary recently commenting that more smaller rail schemes should be examined, is now the time to re-focus on this?

John Eccles has presented the following paper in which he puts Burscough back at the heart of matters and recommends a way forward. Comments are invited.

Towards a Burscough Stations Development Group - A Way Forward?

The loss of ticketing facilities at Burscough Bridge Station following the decision by Lancashire County Council (LCC) to end funding at the end of June 2016, whilst regrettable, need not be regarded as a finite situation.

The modern building at Burscough Bridge Interchange which is owned by LCC is situated on the Southport-bound platform. The station is owned by Network Rail who has a formal lease agreement with the County Council.

As I understand it, from the information given by Roger Bell at the OPSTA AGM, the building was being offered free to appropriate interested parties but of course would be subject to their normal running costs being paid, e.g. gas, water, electricity, business rates and the like. A conservative estimate seems to put this in the region of over £15,000, which I find high, but it might perhaps be in line with commercial costs in the immediate area.

The premises at Burscough were purpose designed as a ticket office/covered waiting area/cafe, plus a small outdoor turning circle and car park and a small grassed area which accommodates local minibuses serving the area, but this circle is too small to accommodate the large (often double deck) vehicles on Stagecoach service 2A which calls nearby. Prior to this becoming a commercial service, the 2A route between Ormskirk and Preston was able to call directly at the station as the operator of the then County Council subsidised service used small Optare single deck buses which were also suited better to some of the narrow roads in the town area (for example the Manor Road and Trevor Road areas).

When I last used the local bus only the 3A was able to draw up next to the station on its journeys between Ormskirk and Wrightington, passing Burscough Junction railway station on the way, but which is never quoted as such in the area timetables, instead using the location of nearby Pardoe Court to describe the nearest stop. So unless one has local knowledge of the area it is not too obvious there is a link between the town's two stations.

The train services at Burscough Bridge run on a half hourly frequency on Weekdays to and from Southport, Wigan and Manchester, hourly in the evenings and all day Sundays. The intermediate rural stations at Hoscar, New Lane and Bescar Lane have a basic two hourly service on Weekdays only, plus a peak hour call at best, Bescar Lane in particular serves the straggling district of Scarisbrick which is very spread out, plus small settlements at Shirdley Hill and Halsall nearby. New Lane Station serves a small settlement adjacent and the nearby locality of Tarlscough. It is on the western extremity of Burscough Bridge. Neither of these two stations is easily accessible by bus, hence the stations being retained many years ago when closure proposals were mooted. Hoscar is in a similar situation.

The road links between Burscough, Southport and Wigan are not good and the A59 road which passes through Ormskirk and Burscough Bridge was identified as a serious problem as far back as 1967 (See OPSTA Newsletter 100) when the former West Lancashire Rural District Council expressed its concern when plans were afoot to close the Ormskirk to Preston railway line, which was once part of a major through route from Liverpool Exchange to Preston and beyond. The local train service was reprieved, though at the time of the ministerial decision, a service of 12

trains a day on weekdays was stipulated. It has hardly changed in the intervening 49 years, despite many changes in the needs of the area.

In 1962 the train service was withdrawn between Southport and Ormskirk severing the link between the two towns. At the time it was intimated that alternative links would be available. Although a dated Sundays' only train between Stockport and Southport was operated via the old Cheshire Lines Committee line and the CLC Aintree junction with the Liverpool-Preston Line, where it continued to Southport through Ormskirk and Burscough Junction and via the south curve to Burscough Bridge, it never called at any stations in the area.

However for a couple of years afterward, a light engine and full train crew worked from Southport to Ormskirk to pick up a set of coaches there which worked a local peak hour stopping service on weekdays between Ormskirk and Preston (I have since located this service in the summer 1962 London Midland Region timetable). Why this set of coaches could not have worked with the engine to and from Southport defies comment, but no, authority had decreed there would be no more passenger trains to and from Southport and Ormskirk. One wonders how much money the service closure really saved..... This tale by the way was confirmed to me by OPSTA member, the late Arthur Nettleton, a former BR fireman based at Southport depot.

A siding at Burscough Junction remained in use for some further years accessed from the Southport-Wigan line via the South curve. There was no physical link with the Ormskirk-Preston line- a simple flat diamond crossing was installed, and when freight ended, it was a straight forward matter to take out the crossing and replace it with plain rail, when the curves were finally lifted in the 1970s.

The track bed remains, but it is heavily overgrown with trees and bushes and will need much clearance but the embankment structure on which the south curve is built appears basically sound, as does the overbridge at School Lane. It raises the question - "How much would it **really** cost to reinstate it as a working railway?"

Over the years various figures have been quoted - the last figure I was aware of was around £12 million pounds which seems a bit over the top for installing a simple line of half a mile of modern track, which only needs to be a single line. Granted there will have to be pointwork and signalling at both Burscough Junction and Burscough Bridge plus necessary train protection and warning systems, but it is a sobering thought to read that at the present time (Summer 2016) the Gloucester-Warwickshire Railway is rebuilding the final mile of track to its Broadway station (opening in 2018), using brand new steel rail from British Steel in Scunthorpe at a cost of £1.25 million pounds, having already raised £700,000 of the cost already. So taking this as a guide, and using the figure quoted above of £12 million what could we likely to get for say, for the other £10.75 million or so?

One of the present day bugbears of the way we do things today is that most construction schemes of many kinds, including railways, get bogged down in the expense of feasibility studies, consultations and the like, adding much cost. In this particular case it simply needs the services of an experienced in-house Network Rail engineer to design a simple basic scheme, and to get on with it. It should be possible to pare down costs without prejudicing the re-installation of this much needed link, which should be very modest in comparison with other schemes going

on in the North West and elsewhere, and which could improve the lot of a potential 100,000 persons, travelwise, in Ormskirk, Southport and the surrounding districts, let alone better accessibility to major towns and cities such as Wigan, Bolton, Manchester, Preston and Liverpool and indeed further afield.

My own experience comes from a 30-year career in the travel industry, always in rail-licensed travel agents, and because of my interest in railways, selling rail travel to all parts of the public was a major facet of my job. One of the things I learnt during my association with the industry up to 1992 was that the travelling public do not like massive changes to their lives and the many cutbacks in the 1960s and 1970s undoubtedly damaged the image of the railways.

Privatisation after 1994 brought much welcome change in that it allowed private money to be released into an ailing industry which by virtue of having been part of an arm of government was always going to be constrained, and always will be, under state ownership. This is not to say that the privatisation model was, and is perfect; we are still on a very big learning curve, and all our modern politicians and planners would do well to remember that.

What of the future?

Initially I envisage the formation of a Burscough Stations development group as soon as possible with an aim of accelerating things between now and 2020 when Merseyrail expects to bring new, possibly dual voltage or independently powered stock onto its lines, which could be useful, should extension from Ormskirk to Preston by Merseyrail ever be contemplated. Also by then from 2018, the North West Electrification should be bedding down. As the skilled engineering teams are likely to be about in the region for a brief while afterwards perhaps Network Rail could be persuaded to add the south Burscough Curve as an extra project rather than as a "stand-alone" scheme with much higher future cost.

Possibilities do exist to be considered. Have we, as OPSTA, the courage to push this much further? We have in our midst some knowledgeable and experienced members, plus over 30 years of campaigning which has resulted in our links with local councils, train operators and politicians being developed to a good level, particularly in recent years. Surely now is the time to grasp this nettle more firmly, before the further passage of time, and ever-increasing costs pushes the chance of reinstatement of this important link out of reach.

Or is "out of reach" just what the powers that be really want? I hope not, but I leave you to judge and will say no more on that topic To iterate what I see as our aims:

1) **(Short Term)** Enhancement of Preston-Ormskirk train services with proper integration with existing local bus service 3A (Ormskirk-Wrightington) which also serves Burscough Junction station, but is never referred to as such. Instead the local stop name is taken from nearby Pardoe Court. The hourly weekday bus service makes a lot of useful local connections as well as facilitating a link between Burscough's two stations, though this is constrained by the erratic train frequency currently operated. The bus service should be given more prominence in the Merseyrail train timetable, other than the current one line entry on the time table pages. Because the service is just three miles away over the border in Lancashire,

political insularism no doubt applies which has blighted many things ever since the 1974 Local Government Act.

I recall in the earlier years seeing maps published in Lancashire with blank space where Merseyside exists, and indeed vice versa. I am minded of a certain cartoon character in the Daily Mirror in the 1950s called Useless Eustace, and his long suffering wife whose stock saying was "Daft I call it!"

2) **(Medium Term) Re-instatement of the South Curve** and an extension of Merseyrail electric trains as far as Burscough Junction. Our passenger counts and surveys show clearly that unlike the approach considered in Merseytravel's Burscough Demand Study direct services between Preston and Ormskirk should be retained. Based on proven demand some additional/ alternative services from Preston would stop at Burscough Junction and then reverse to Burscough Bridge to connect with Manchester line trains.

3) **(Long Term)** Extension of Merseyrail services from Ormskirk to Burscough Bridge, giving connecting access at Burscough Bridge to existing rail services to and from Southport and Manchester, and, at Burscough Junction access to connecting trains to and from Preston. As it is policy for Merseyrail stations to be manned the purpose built building at Burscough Bridge Interchange is already there; I expect the programme to have already achieved the re-establishment of a ticket office.

At Burscough Junction an exception could apply, as with the stations at Bache and Capenhurst on the Merseyrail Wirral line which are unmanned. On the Preston line fare collection could continue as now, on the train, but a likely improvement in passenger numbers at Burscough Junction station should allow for local ticketing facilities in the future when the station is redeveloped; it has a lot of basic infrastructure surviving to enable improvements to take place. The small, modern booking office at Freshfield is an example of such a basic structure, housing a ticket office and staff facilities.

4) **(Extra Long Term)** Full extension of electric trains to Southport. The Lancashire and Yorkshire railway was working on this 100 years ago, and the third rail reached Meols Cop in 1910 but the scheme was stopped in 1916 as a consequence of the First World War creating other priorities.. British Rail took away the third rail passenger services in 1964 along with the through trains to Preston from Southport, and after the closure of Meols Cop Works in 1970, took up the third rail as well.

Today's Meols Cop station, with its continuing rise in passenger use could once again be an important contributor to such a scheme with its extensive surrounding commuter districts of Blowick, Kew, Meols Cop and Churchtown could be brought back into the Merseyrail network sooner. Meols Cop station, with a new street level entrance and use of land from its former goods yard has some scope for a small park and ride facility. Its existing island platform can already handle six coach trains (e.g. a full length 6 - car Merseyrail set). An alternative entrance in the vicinity of Hawthorne Grove and Pitt Street might enable it to have proper disabled access, currently precluded by the entrance stairway at the junction of Norwood Road and Bispham Road overbridge.

John Eccles

Preston – Ormskirk - Liverpool

We still await information on the proposed increase to 17 services a day between Preston and Ormskirk; we are aware from the issue of Manchester services and other rail user groups that Northern is still working on the required, new timetables across the franchise. Here is the tease, we may get some insights when Northern meet with us in November.

In the meantime we continue passenger counts and liaison with different groups. Recently Edge Hill University came back to us with the plight of their students from Blackburn who suffer from abysmal connections at Preston; their travel times and needs have been passed to Northern. If delivery of an hourly timetable does entail linking our service with the East Lancs line then at least connections will be assured but timings is another matter.

In the last edition I postulated that a better service would be to run trains to an irregular but more frequent schedule by having trains pass at Rufford.

We became aware that Network Rail had sought formal road and crossing closures at Rufford including a full week during October so we invited them to inform us of what infrastructure work was taking place. Our Secretary, Colin Wells summarised and commented on the briefing provided:

A remarkable turn round for Network Rail who until relatively recently seemed to view the passing loop at Rufford as time expired and due for removal. The proposal probably embeds the loop into the eventual take over by the Regional Control Centre.

The signalling control panel in the signal box will be changed to reflect the new items and working. The points will be motor worked from the signalling panel rather than train-operated.

The working of the single line to Ormskirk will alter from train staff to the operation of track circuits. A new signal will be provided on the Ormskirk platform replacing the stop board and token to control trains between Rufford and Ormskirk.

Token working to Midge Hall will continue.

The crossing barriers will be replaced and Network Rail anticipates they should be down for a shorter time when a train is due to pass.

Line speed remains 50 mph.

This begs the question why invest in the infrastructure if it won't be used?

Network Rail has since confirmed the work at Rufford is on schedule to complete on October 24th (as this newsletter goes to press). Furthermore there is more ongoing work to replace rail and sleepers around Croston and the Farington Curve. Hopefully this should all help the ride of the 142 but will it facilitate any service improvement otherwise? Network Rail expects to conduct a 'Line Speed Improvement' review in the coming months and will report conclusions to the Community Rail Partnership.

Services through Ormskirk and electrification –

Passengers from stations between Kirkdale and Maghull that used the special Motorfest service emphasised this was their preferred rail route for journeys north. This was no surprise as it has been a consistent message coming out from all of our previous surveys.

OPSTA has understood from recent dialogue with Merseytravel it is focusing its resources on programmes either in or due to start their construction and implementation phases, including the just approved new station for Maghull North which is planned to be in operation in 2018. Thus no immediate follow up work is planned on the Burscough Demand Study. Merseytravel, however, was keen to give reassurance that extension of services north of Ormskirk would remain part of the Long Term Rail Strategy following a review of plans to be submitted to the Combined Authority of the Liverpool City Region by the end of the financial year.

Moreover, it still wishes to receive updates on our research of service usage and demand. While it is not planned to conduct a passenger survey this Autumn, there is an intention to conduct full day's passenger counts during a weekday and on a Saturday. Please contact us if interested in doing some of this.

With every national news bulletin and newspaper seeming to report daily on the state of Southern Rail, I was pleased to accept our southern correspondent's offer of a further article. Note he wrote this in August.

“How not to run a train company”

For those of you who have followed the Saga of Southern Rail in these pages over the past few months, recent headlines should have come as no surprise. “We are Angry” “Woman sacked for lateness” “Commuter Hell” and many more. Govia started the long slide into disgrace based on incompetence when they closed the perfectly adequate ticket hall at Brighton station and moved the facility to a much smaller and harder to find area, which, when queues reach more than say 10 people the remainder stand outside in the cold, albeit under cover - the original ticket facility became a Collection Point (called ironically Duddle) for electronically ordered goods. No arguments would persuade Govia that this was not a good idea - after all passengers (or customers as we now are) would find their way to get a ticket, otherwise they couldn't get on a train and passengers arriving to collect their ordered goods would help to pay the rent to 'Duddle' partly owned by Network Rail(!) when they collect their goods. Is someone losing out here - the passenger perhaps?

Train services have been inadequate for several years, but recently, partly due to major building work at London Bridge Station, things have got a lot worse. The Government has come to an arrangement with Govia whereby they are paid a fixed management fee for running the railway whilst the Government takes the financial hit for the mayhem produced - this means that the Government has an unusual interest in keeping the lid on the boiling pot. The RMT meanwhile have a genuine interest in the issue of safety and the need for train guards - some Sets on this line

are 12 carriages long and obviously a driver cannot see all the doors in many stations.

Demonstrations have been held at both ends of the line, Victoria and Brighton; Chris Grayling the Rail Minister has become involved but so far without result - there is a standoff, and the latest wheeze to reduce cancellations, was to reduce the timetable by 15 percent or 341 daily services so that a more reliable timetable could be run - and guess what - it doesn't work - now trains on the reduced service are being cancelled! Thousands of people use these trains every day - we have some very swish modern stations and the latest in very expensive rolling stock - if only we had the management to match!

Ian Davies

Are you sitting comfortably?

Sheila Davidson from Friends of Hindley Station (fellow campaigners for our Piccadilly services) with grandson Anthony at a recent event held by Northern where anyone could try out 3 types of seat and vote for their preference.

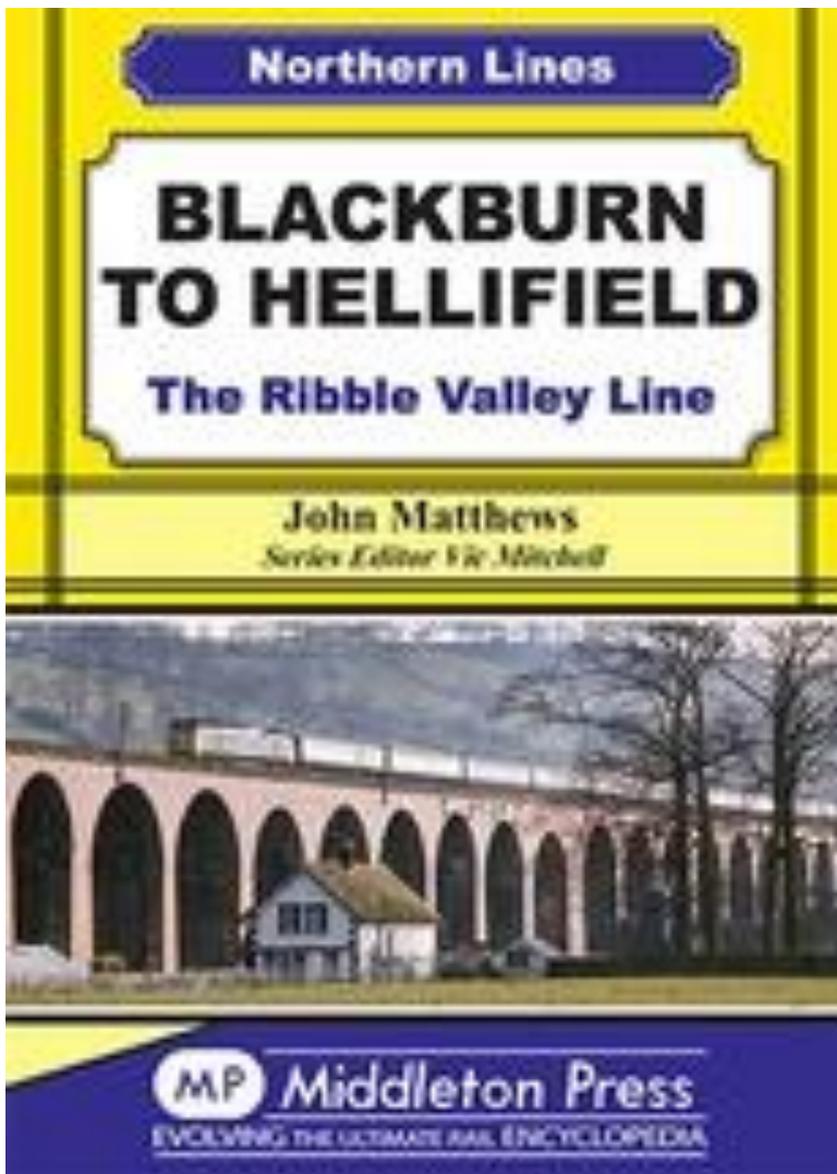
Sheila and OPSTA members have reported that it was unclear whether these seats were intended for the all new trains only or the refurbished stock too.

Northern has since stated in its customer magazine that this was part of involving passengers in new train design.

However, if the existing units are to be refurbished to a standard that "customers will think they are on a new train" shouldn't that mean ???

Anthony made the most apposite comment, he wanted to see the whole train!





As always in this newsletter we will give details of new books covering rail lines in the North West or subjects of local interest if reviewed by one of our members or especially if written by a member as is the case here.

I understand the last book covered which was Blackpool Central is now out of print.

'Blackburn to Hellifield' by John Matthews will be published by Middleton Press on the 29th October at £18.95 in hardback (ISBN 978 1 908174 95 6).

It is available through their website and also at Waterstones.

When John self-effacingly mentioned he had a book coming out I set out to find more:

Your first book and what inspired you to write it? This will be my first published book. I was attracted by the beautiful countryside that this little known line runs through.

Do you feel that you have other books in you that will follow? I have a couple of ideas for a further book, possibly the Fylde lines of East Lancashire. *Don't overlook West Lancashire John.*

The book has 120 photographs plus maps. Added interest for us is the renaissance of passenger services up to Clitheroe and sustained growth of passenger numbers.

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