

North West

By Trevor Bishop

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■ ■ Millions spent on Chester station area upgrade



Picture: John Williamson

This mileage sign was just one of the facilities at Chester station getting an upgrade in the £1.4 million scheme, which is part of a £10 million Chester Renaissance regeneration programme. Renewal of track through platform 4 and the through relief line was under way in May. The work will include a new waiting room, lift and staircase access to the footbridge. Thanks to an initiative by two of Arriva Trains Wales' cleaning staff, the flower bed by platforms 5 and 6 now sports flowers, brightening up a previous eye-sore. A further effort is under way to recover the overgrown vegetation at the west end of platform 4/7. Congratulations are in order for this notable improvement to the general ambience of the platform.

■ ■ Improvements to Wirral line stations

A new retail outlet at Hooton sells tickets, newspapers and refreshments. This station on Merseyrail's Wirral line also now boasts a fully accessible toilet, along with a new waiting shelter on the Liverpool-bound platform. Secure cycle parking will be provided later this year and a new footbridge with lifts is to be built at the south end of the station.

Also on the Wirral line, Rock Ferry will benefit from a new booking hall and waiting room with toilet facilities. From December, there will be a train every 15 minutes. Rock Ferry station will also gain secure cycle parking later this year, funded from a successful £1 million joint bid by Merseytravel and Merseyrail to become a national cycling demonstration train operator. The money was awarded by Cycling England, an organisation funded by the Department for Transport and will benefit nine stations on the Wirral line and 18 stations on the Merseyrail network overall.

■ ■ Saveaway tickets are now on the cards

The one-day off-peak Merseyrail Saveaway ticket, which can be used on buses, trains and ferries, is now available from Chester, and other staffed stations. Normally available only as a scratchcard it can now be bought as a standard National Rail ticket. The Merseyrail all zones Saveaway costs £4.50 for an adult and allows travel on the whole of the Merseyrail system. At Bache and Capenhurst, passengers have to buy a normal ticket and exchange it for a Saveaway at a manned Merseyrail station. A map of the area is available at www.merseytravel.gov.uk/map_saveaway-zones.html

■ ■ £11 million could bring the Halton curve back into use

Bringing the Halton curve back into bi-directional use as a connection between Frodsham and Runcorn would cost £11 million, Merseyrail's resource director Jim Barclay told North Cheshire Rail Users' Group at Frodsham on the occasion of their twentieth anniversary.

This would allow for two trains an hour between Liverpool and Chester and speed up access to John Lennon airport via Liverpool South Parkway. The extension of such trains to Wrexham is feasible once capacity of the single-line section is improved.

Trains not buses

by Trevor Garrod

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Sometimes engineering work has to take place on the railway. That is inevitable. How Network Rail and the train operators handle it is important for passengers.

Complete possession of the track and bus substitution may be the easiest option for them. However, it is not easy for customers.

Railfuture believes train operators should offer a discount to passengers when their journeys are disrupted and lengthened because of bus replacement.

In Canada, for example, passengers may claim a refund in such circumstances. A similar refund has occasionally operated in Germany for season ticket holders inconvenienced by a long period of bus substitution.

Experiences in East Anglia over the past six months have indicated that the following should apply:

A member of the train operating company's staff should ride on each replacement bus to check tickets, collect fares and assist passengers. There have been many examples of fare evasion because this did not happen.

Passengers not familiar with the area have also been dropped, sometimes in a public car park more than 100 metres from the station, and left to their own devices.

If you are dropped with your luggage by a replacement bus from Ipswich at Stansted Airport bus station, it is not easy to find the

railway station (which is underground!) and there is no one to ask.

The coach driver should be allowed to use his or her own judgement about which route to take if there is traffic congestion or if there are other problems on the road.

Bus replacement services need to be well publicised. That has not always been the case.

Bus replacement should be the last resort, not the first resort, and be used only when there is no reasonable alternative.

If train operators are required to provide staff on buses and to pay refunds, they may think more seriously about these alternatives.

One alternative which could certainly be used in some cases would be for Network Rail to utilise single line working.

Another is to divert trains via another route.

A third is to allow passengers to use their tickets on trains travelling by another route and by another operator if necessary at no extra charge.

We in East Anglia have urged that such conditions be placed on the company which wins the new franchise.

Other branches could also urge existing franchisees elsewhere to look more seriously at the alternatives, and when they really have to use replacement buses to take measures to make them more user-friendly.

Oil money and propaganda

Transport policy has been distorted for years by propaganda and behind-the-scenes manoeuvring by the road lobby, which includes the oil companies.

Now though, the problems of pollution and global warming, partly caused by years of over-reliance on road transport, have made the advantages of rail almost impossible to ignore.

One of the rearguard actions left to the road lobby is to deny the existence of climate change.

That is presumably why ExxonMobil donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to climate change sceptics, as reported in *Railwatch* 123.

Now Greenpeace says that another oil company, Koch Industries, donated £32 million over a three-year period, three times as much as Exxon. Koch Industries is accused of funding 35 "conservative and libertarian groups" and 20 congressmen and senators in the USA.

Greenpeace said these groups have spread misinformation and led to a sustained assault on climate change scientists and green alternatives to fossil fuels. Greenpeace, which is

well known for taking direct action, said: "The company's network of lobbyists, former executives and organisations has created a forceful stream of misinformation that Koch-funded entities produce and disseminate.

"The propaganda is then replicated, repackaged and echoed many times throughout the Koch-funded web of political front groups and think-tanks.

"Koch Industries is playing a quiet but dominant role in the global warming debate.

"This private, out-of-sight corporation has become the financial kingpin of climate science denial and clean energy opposition."

Koch Industries is led by Charles and David Koch, the "19th richest men in the world".

Koch Industries was fined £20 million for its role in 300 spills, involving more than three million gallons of crude oil.

Greenpeace concluded: "Koch Industries and the Koch brothers are among the most formidable obstacles to advancing clean energy and climate policy in the US."