

North West

By Arthur Thomson
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■ ■ Helsby station crossings

Rail campaigners are continuing their fight for the restoration of pedestrian level crossings at Helsby station on the Chester-Runcorn line. The removal of the "barrow" crossings by Network Rail in 2008 caused outrage among rail users, particularly wheelchair users. North Cheshire Rail Users objected that there was no meaningful consultation with rail users and they have enlisted the support of new MP Graham Evans. This year, in May, Network Rail finally issued the consultation document, relating to the removal of the crossings.

NCRUG has made it clear people still arrive at the station, expecting to use the crossings, reports Frank Thomas. The group says the original consultation was sent only to Arriva Trains Wales, even though the volunteer Helsby Working Party had written permission from Network Rail to use the crossings.

Simon Pickering has collected all the responses and sent a detailed report to Network Rail. NCRUG is now awaiting a decision.

■ ■ Replacement buses cause anguish

Richard Greenwood of Support The Oldham, Rochdale and Manchester line group came to the rescue of a family with three young children (one in a carrycot) who were stranded at Castleton when a rail replacement bus on the Rochdale to Manchester Victoria route failed to turn up. The family, who were on their way to Ludlow and were becoming distressed, had to wait well over an hour for a bus. Richard discovered from First Bus that some buses were so full, and so delayed by road congestion, that they omitted the stop at Castleton. Richard has written to Northern Rail asking for the bus contact number to be published on the rail replacement posters.

On the same day, a party of three young people from Slovakia arrived off the bus at Castleton, looking for the Blue John Cavern. Staff at Manchester Piccadilly had misdirected them to Manchester Victoria when they had asked for Castleton for the Blue John Cavern. Blue John Cavern is in fact more than 40 miles away – in the opposite direction from Manchester – near Castleton, Derbyshire. The nearest rail stations are Edale and Hope.

■ ■ £400 million airport tram deal is agreed

Campaigners were delighted by news that contracts had been signed for the nine-mile extension of Manchester's Metrolink tram system to Manchester Airport by 2016. The airport is contributing £50 million to the £400 million project to extend Metrolink to serve Chorlton, Northern Moor, Baguley and Wythenshawe. The aim is to run an all-night service from the city centre which will help staff and passengers get to the airport. Metrolink is also being extended to serve Oldham and Rochdale town centres.

■ ■ Network Rail's rescue plan for Manchester Victoria

Users of Manchester Victoria station were delighted to learn from a *Manchester Evening News* report that the station, named the worst in the country last year, will be modernised, even though the Department for Transport has withdrawn a £5 million contribution towards the £30 million scheme. The paper predicted that Network Rail would go ahead with a modified version of the scheme, including fixing the leaky roof. Work on a £3.6 million scheme to rebuild platforms one and two and renew their railway tracks is almost complete.



The big society is here

By Philip Bisatt

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Bridgwater is a sizeable Somerset town with a population of 35,000, served primarily by First Great Western's Taunton-Cardiff service.

The fine station buildings are Grade 2 listed, and were refurbished in the 1990s. They now provide a welcome first impression of the town for visitors.

The qualities of the architecture are complemented by the efforts of the Friends of Bridgwater Station.

Mike Hodge has been an active Friend for some years and he also finds time to be a Friend of Crediton station on the Exeter-Barnstaple Tarka Line). After 35 years as joint stationmaster at Crowcombe on the West Somerset Railway, Mike now attends to the gardens at Bridgwater that do much to brighten the scene for passengers.

I recently joined Mike – who is a member of Railfuture – in some gardening work on Bridgwater down platform. This involved putting in 150 bedding plants, many of which were paid for by First Great Western, while others had been provided by Mike

himself or generously donated by Wraxall Nurseries.

Planting and watering made for an enjoyable morning, broken only by the passage of Voyager CrossCountry trains – none of which serve Bridgwater – and periodic stops to watch the arrival and departure of local services to and from Taunton.

As is sadly too often the case, there have been some problems with vandalism requiring a security presence at Bridgwater when the station is not staffed.

Station Friend Mike keeps a watchful eye and reports anything untoward to the staff, Janet and Gail, who are at the station on weekday mornings. They look after the station well and provide a friendly service to the growing number of passengers.

Part of the station not required by the operator has been let to Bridgwater Model Railways, and it is hoped that the privately run refreshment kiosk, Dave's Diner, currently located in a portable building on the forecourt, may also be moved into the station itself. After our day's work was done, Mike and I adjourned to Dave's Diner for a well-earned hot snack!



FRIEND: Mike Hodge gardening at Bridgwater station

Journeys without borders

A Journeys without Borders report from the European Passengers' Federation was issued in September.

It is intended to be read in conjunction with the updated list of cross-border services, now available on the EPF website www.epf.eu. Thanks to Ian McDonald for updating this list, to Simon Hope for new new maps and to Lloyd Butler for the final design work. Thanks are also due to many members of organisations which make up EPF for providing information

on recent developments. The report was written by Trevor Garrod and looks at positive and negative developments and what can be learned from these. It concentrates on rail border crossings but also draws attention to places where the bus provides an effective service, for example in a mountainous border area between Switzerland, Austria and Italy. The report is available from Trevor Garrod at 15 Clapham Rd South, Lowestoft, NR32 1RQ. Please send an SAE.