

North West

By Trevor Bishop

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Passengers pay the price

Closure of the Oldham loop line for conversion to Metrolink has caused overcrowding on the nearby Rochdale-Manchester Victoria line, as predicted by local user group STORM. The closure prompted large numbers of passengers travelling to Manchester to take the replacement bus in the opposite direction and get a train on the direct Rochdale-Victoria line, which is quicker than the replacement bus all the way to Victoria. When they got to Rochdale, however, there were no extra carriages to take the strain, despite pleas from various parties for this to be in place before the closure. Northern Trains said it could not afford to run extra services, and the Department for Transport did not take action. A few days into the chaos, Greater Manchester Integrated Transport Authority agreed the trains previously being used on the Oldham loop could be redeployed and it would provide funds as a temporary measure. Meanwhile it would appeal to the DfT for additional funding.

Mersey stations promote preserved railway



In a good example of co-operation between the preserved Llangollen Railway and workaday Merseytravel, a new poster is on display at 206 Merseyrail stations, promoting the Llangollen Railway. It has been supplemented with information supplied by the Chester-Shrewsbury rail officer Sheila Dee, promoting rail routes to other centres at Chester, Wrexham and Ruabon and for bus connections. The poster has a "how to get there" map and

a promotion for Santa Trains. It is a good plug for Llangollen Railway – for Wrexham and the bus link via Ruabon. The poster (above) is seen at Llangollen with station manager Jim Ritchie.

Wrexham General station

Work was under way in October to complete the installation of the signalling panel in Croes Newydd signalbox. This involved some weekend periods of complete blockade at Wrexham General station when no trains ran and bus substitution was the order of the day on both the Chester-Shrewsbury line and the Borderlands line to Bidston. All the remaining semaphore signals in the Croes Newydd area have now been replaced by colour lights and, in some instances, new colour lights with routing feathers have replaced older colour light signals.

Signalling has been modified to ease the passage of Wrexham & Shropshire trains. The panel has potential for expansion to take in facilities at Gobowen and Penyffordd, if necessary.

Crossing barriers on the Watery Road level crossing have also been renewed and pedestrian access brought up to standard by the council. This was achieved with a period of one-way road working which kept the crossing open.

At Gobowen a similar exercise to replace the crossing barriers had the road closed for three weeks.

Mainline upgrade

Redoubling of the line north of Wrexham remains on the agenda with the Welsh Assembly Government keen to see journey times between north and south Wales reduced. Inspection saloon Caroline toured the route from Shrewsbury through to Holyhead with WAG representatives on board to see what was needed by way of improvement. Network Rail's various options for redoubling the line are being considered, all involving considerable expense far in excess of the supposed savings earned from the singling exercise back in 1986. The report of a feasibility study for WAG is now awaited.

Darting over the Irish Sea

By Trevor Garrod

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During a visit to Ireland by train and ferry in September, I was briefed by colleagues from Rail Users Ireland and the Consumers' Association of Ireland as well as by Railfuture's Northern Ireland representative Mike Stevenson.

From my home in East Anglia, a rail-sea return to Dun Laoghaire costs £58 but it is a pity there is now only one sailing a day.

The route surely has potential, especially as at Dun Laoghaire you can walk off the ferry and across the road to the station, the Marine Parade and the town centre.

Other ferries from Holyhead run to Dublin's docklands, where it is necessary to catch a bus into the city centre. STENA's contract with Dun Laoghaire Harbour Company



is due for renewal in three years' time. Let us hope it will be renewed. Travelling around the Dublin area has its pleasures, with the electric Dublin Area Rapid Transit trains going into the heart of the city, the modern LUAS (Irish for speed) trams and plenty of buses.

Yet when I asked for a day network ticket I was told I would have to buy either "DART and bus" or "DART and LUAS" – there was nothing for all three.

Iarnrod Eireann (Irish Rail) has invested heavily in new trains in



recent years. These have undoubtedly boosted usage.

On the Dublin-Sligo line, passenger numbers tripled following the introduction of new and frequent trains. The modern comfortable inter-city trains on the Dublin-Cork route are popular and it is sometimes difficult to obtain a seat.

However, IE is reported to be reluctant to add extra coaches, other than for big sporting events.

Investment in hardware has not always been matched by investment in customer care and staff training.

I could not find a pocket timetable at three stations where I tried and at one important DART station the timetable was months out of date.

Buying a day return from Dun Laoghaire to Belfast proved impossible. The ticket clerk said his machine could not do it. I had to buy a ticket to Dublin Connolly

and then join a long queue there to rebook.

If you want to complain about a train or bus service, it is difficult to find out whom to contact.

These are the sorts of issues which RUI and CAI are pursuing. Find out more via their websites.

More dramatic, however, in August, a viaduct at Malahide on the Dublin-Belfast main line collapsed.

This affected the "Enterprise" trains which normally provide an attractive service and are an excellent example of cooperation between IE and Northern Ireland Railways.

A bus replacement has run from Dublin to Drogheda where trains still operate on the scenic run to Belfast Central.

NIR has taken delivery of a streamlined diesel unit fleet in the past five years and you can change into one of these at Portadown for a local service to Belfast Great Victoria Street, which is a good example of a combined modern bus and train station and a short walk from the city centre.

Translink, which runs train and bus services in Northern Ireland, produces an excellent information booklet and handy timetable leaflets, and its staff seemed very friendly and efficient.

There are also prominent notices telling you how and to whom to direct any complaints.

All is not perfect, however. Service frequency on the Londonderry line is hampered by a long single-track section. There is scope for investing in the infrastructure here to allow more trains to run.

When the Lisburn-Antrim passenger service was withdrawn, a replacement bus service was introduced. It no longer connects with trains.

There is no rail-sea-rail crossing to Northern Ireland any more. It is either rail-sea-bus or bus-sea-rail – a bit confusing.

You can book a ticket in Belfast to stations south of the border, such as Cork. But your ticket may not be valid on the LUAS tram link between the two main stations in Dublin.

I returned to Holyhead on a busy ferry, with over 100 foot passengers, many of whom squeezed into a two-coach class 158 unit which left nearly an hour after the boat had arrived.

By the time this train left Bangor (Gwynedd) it was standing room only and by Rhyl passengers were being turned away. The Virgin train from Chester was also very full.

Clearly there is still a market for rail/sea/rail. Do some train operating companies need to be made aware of it?

This is an issue on which the Railfuture international commit-

with a rail trip in mind



SPEEDY: One of Dublin's LUAS trams which serve 346 stations

tee hopes to do further research in 2010. Malahide viaduct was expected to reopen in mid-November, three months after the collapse.

Iarnrod Eireann has spent more than £3.6million rebuilding a weir which had collapsed and reinstating a pillar on which the viaduct stands.

The collapse is still being investigated by IE and the Railway Safety Commission.

Mark Gleeson of Rail Users Ireland adds: "The ticketing problems Trevor raises are probably the most frustrating problem for passengers.

"There is a rail/bus/luas monthly ticket but it is only available from staffed train stations.

"The LUAS owners, the Railway Procurement Agency, refuse to sell it from its ticket machines and

the bus company does its best to ignore the fact it exists. "It is possible to purchase a ticket from any station in the Republic to any station in Northern Ireland and the ticket vending machines at Dublin Connolly have every station in NI available as options.

"But we give the ticket codes to passengers so they can 'negotiate' impossible tickets with bemused clerks.

"We are in quite deep negotiations with senior people in Irish Rail to solve a lot of the ticketing issues and hope to have roll out on several significant improvements, including smartcards before Christmas."

Rail Users Ireland is a voluntary body relying solely on donations from the public to keep going.

More info: www.railusers.ie
www.consumerassociation.ie/

Sustainable action plan

Two years ago the European Passengers' Federation gave its input to the European Commission's Green paper on Sustainable Urban Mobility.

At EPF's 2008 London conference, the then Transport Commissioner Jacques Barrot also spoke about the issue. In September this year, the Commission adopted a promised Action Plan. Key points are:

2009 Encouraging Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans by providing guidance, and developing incentives for local authorities.

Improving travel information, including the development of national and regional multi-modal journey planners and ultimately the provision of an internet public transport portal at EU level.

Optimising existing European Union funding sources to give priority to urban mobility. Setting up an urban mobility observatory to share data and best practice. Information exchange on urban pricing, information issues and information technology.

2010 Strengthening passenger rights through dialogue with stakeholders, including users, to identify best practice and conditions

for strengthening passenger rights in urban transport. The aim is for a voluntary agreement that complements the Commission's regulatory approach, including quality indicators, commonly agreed complaints procedures and reporting mechanisms.

2011 Sustainable urban mobility and regional policy, increasing the awareness of funding sources (including EU funds) and the link between mobility and the Trans European Transport Networks.

Better accessibility for people with reduced mobility with emphasis on infrastructure improvements, such as accessible subways. Study on the urban aspects of internalisation of external costs.

2012 Information technology systems for urban mobility, including electronic ticketing and payment, information, demand management, interoperability of payment systems across services and modes, including the use of interoperable cards with a focus on major European destinations such as airports and stations.

EPF will follow with interest the progress of the Action Plan, which includes many topics EPF has said need to be tackled.

London and South East

By Graham Larkbey

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Rail line quiz for Boris

As the Victoria-Denmark Hill-London Bridge line celebrates its centenary as one of Britain's early electrified routes (December 1909), the campaign to save it from withdrawal in 2012 continues to gather momentum. London Mayor and Transport for London overlord Boris Johnson faced a barrage of questions about the controversial plan to sever the route at a packed Mayor's Question Time held in Brixton on 9 November, and it was raised in Parliament a few days later when local MP Simon Hughes initiated a Commons debate on the issue. Many people rely on the existing service to get quickly and easily into central London, and campaigners argue that the commencement of East London Line extension services to Clapham Junction over the route in 2012 should be an addition, not a replacement.



Hunt for green shoots in Chiltern's third way

Chiltern Railways has submitted its Evergreen 3 enhancement proposals to Network Rail which include making most longer-distance trains non-stop between Marylebone and Gerrards Cross, and the introduction of a "stopping" service between those two points. However, Chiltern has stated that this new service will still not mean the long-awaited provision of an all-day, all-week service at its two Sudbury stations, so the campaign on that issue will continue.

New look on the Overground

Some of the new trains are now running in regular service on the North London Line, and are more like Docklands Light Railway trains with their "straight-through" connections between carriages – and rather hard seats!. No firm news yet on delivery of the new Barking-Gospel Oak diesel units. The campaign continues to get this route electrified, to benefit both passengers and freight operators. On the West London line, Imperial Wharf's new station is now open, but there is still no sign of Southern's proposed Ealing Broadway-Olympia service starting (or how frequent it will be). The weekly Tuesdays-only "Ghost Bus" between Ealing Broadway and Wandsworth Road was reportedly due for withdrawal in mid-December. Attempts to elicit further information from the Department for Transport on both these questions have produced no response.

Victoria line

The first new trains are now running in public service. Improved features include better visibility between cars, wider doors, and better in-train information systems.

Rail campaigners win over high-speed link

Bexhill Rail Action Group leapt into action when members spotted that Southern's December 2009 mini timetables did mention connections at Ashford on to Southeastern's 140mph Javelin trains which give a much faster time to London from Bexhill, saving an hour, using Marshlink trains to get to Ashford via Hastings and Rye.

Following publicity in the Bexhill Observer, Southern has now agreed to produce new special mini timetables which will be "available shortly".

The Ashford-St Pancras Javelins also provide a new domestic rail connection for Eurostar passengers at Ebbsfleet International station until now only accessible by road.

Both Southeastern and Southern belong to the same parent company, GoVia.

A copy of connecting times for high-speed train services can be viewed on the BRAG website: www.bexhillrailaction.org.uk