

Greater Manchester Transport Campaign

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After four years of repeated requests for a shelter here outside Urbis, we've finally received a firm promise one will soon be provided — but we won't be celebrating until we see it in position (page 8).

INVITATION

Dear Members and Friends,

Our next **Open Public Meeting** is to be held on Tuesday 28th October at 7 pm at the Friends' Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester (behind the Central Library, St Peter's Square) to which you are invited. Light refreshments will be available from 6.30 pm and our speaker will be Mr Philip Purdy, the new Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive Director for Metrolink. Mr Purdy was previously the Asset Development Manager at Yarra Trams which operates 150 miles of tramway in Melbourne, Australia.

The Independent Voice for Public Transport Users in Greater Manchester

This is an opportunity to learn about the future plans and hopes for our Metrolink and of course there will be time for your questions. Do come and bring a friend.

RAIL UPDATE

BY ANDREW MACFARLANE

We now have a closure date for the Manchester Victoria – Oldham – Rochdale “Oldham Loop” line. The last trains will run on Saturday 3rd October 2009. As mentioned in the last issue, the highly regrettable decision was made to go for closure of the line in one fell swoop rather than a staged closure. It would have been possible to convert the line as far as Shaw with a new Metrolink station to the south of the level crossing whilst maintaining a rail service from the existing Shaw & Crompton station via Rochdale to Manchester. This would have minimised inconvenience to many existing users. As it is, the section from Oldham to Rochdale will have no service from October 2009 to spring 2012. It is planned to start the Metrolink service between Manchester and *Central Park (Newton Heath) in spring 2011, on to Oldham in autumn 2011 and finally to Rochdale in spring 2012. The conversion of the Oldham Loop to Metrolink will be very much a double-edged sword. **also see page 8*

On the plus side we have:

1. A much more frequent service (every 6 minutes Manchester-Shaw and every 12 minutes on to Rochdale).
2. A through service from the Loop to the centre of Manchester.
3. Through services to some Metrolink destinations on other lines.
4. Faster journeys between stations due to better acceleration of trams and better hill climbing.
5. New stations at Monsall, *Central Park, South Chadderton, Freehold and Newbold.
6. Large, new car parks at Hollinwood and Derker stations.

On the minus side we have:

1. Higher, premium fares, which are not properly integrated with the National Rail network. It will probably not be possible to book from Oldham Loop stations to anywhere on the National Rail network beyond Greater Manchester.
2. Passengers will no longer be able to use National Railcards (Senior, Family & Friends, 16-25 and so on), Countycards or Rail Ranger tickets on the line. Rochdale–Manchester Metrolink tickets will probably not be interavailable with trains on the heavy rail line via Castleton.
3. All the stations will be unstaffed.

4. There will not be a member of staff on the vehicle apart from the driver, who will be isolated from the passengers.
5. The trams will probably not carry bikes unlike the present trains.
6. The trams will not have toilets unlike the present trains.
7. Loss of through-trains to Salford Central, Salford Crescent, Wigan etc.
8. Excursion trains and freight will not be able to use the line.

So on the face of it there are more cons than pros but time will tell whether passengers will vote with their feet and whether the conversion is a success. The twin factors of much higher frequency and improved penetration of the centre of Manchester should be a recipe for success (as was demonstrated following the conversion of the Altrincham and Bury lines).

Be prepared for the December timetable changes

The December 2008 timetable is nearly upon us. The main changes were outlined in the last issue but there are some further changes to report. In a welcome move, the stops at Stockport in Virgin Trains' Manchester – London Euston service are to become “open stops” as opposed to the present pick up only southbound/set down only northbound arrangement. This will help to provide much-needed extra seats between Manchester and Stockport at peak periods. It will also help to compensate for the loss of the two peak-hour trains each way to and from the mid-Cheshire line, which will terminate/start at Stockport, and the loss of one of the two Birmingham services each hour (the Bristol train) which, unbelievably, is to run through Stockport non-stop as mentioned in the last issue. There is to be a new two-hourly Southport-Wigan-Piccadilly-Stockport-Altrincham-Chester service on Sundays, which will provide the first all year round Sunday service between the mid-Cheshire line and Manchester since October 1992. The Manchester Victoria-Stalybridge-Huddersfield Sunday service becomes hourly from December but there is still no sign of a much-needed Sunday service on the Atherton line. The Manchester-Llandudno service leaves Piccadilly at 50 minutes past each hour from December. On ticketing, the cheapest Virgin Trains advance purchase single between Manchester and London Euston is reduced to £8 from December when the three trains per hour service begins. £10 advance purchase single fares are now available between Manchester Piccadilly and Stockport and Colwyn Bay and Llandudno.

New campaign group at Wythenshawe

A campaign group, the Wythenshawe Rail Action Group (WRAG), has been set up to campaign for a new station on the Altrincham-Stockport line at Baguley. The station would serve the regionally important Wythenshawe Hospital and would also be a potential future interchange with the proposed Metrolink line to Manchester Airport. Predictably, GMPTE has poured cold water on the idea but the campaign continues. A blog and online petition can be found at

CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

The Greater Manchester Scandal—don't be fooled— Congestion Charges and TIF bid

Most of you will have seen the large advertisements on buses, trains and trams or in bus/rail stations purporting to give you information about the suggested congestion charges (Toll Taxes) resulting from Greater Manchester's proposed application under the Transport Innovation Fund known as the TIF Bid.

To say that these advertisements are economical with the truth is a masterpiece of understatement as they quite deliberately suggest all sorts of vast increases in public transport will happen as a result whereas there is no way all the suggested improvements could happen or be sustained.

The basic facts are that (prior to the financial crisis) the Government offered to grant Greater Manchester £1.5 BILLION and will allow us to borrow a further £1.2 BILLION provided congestion charges are introduced. It is not clear whether they would have to be in the exact form that AGMA (the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities) proposes but the theory is that the revenue from the charges is intended to recover the £1.2 BILLION plus interest over say 30 years.

The congestion charges if implemented could result in motorists paying a different amount to drive into Manchester five days running and paying nothing on the sixth day which would undoubtedly cause terrible confusion.

Despite the majority of councillors on Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Authority probably being against the proposals, the Authority still continues to finance these misleading advertisements. They do not point out the horrendous expense of fitting all cars owned by residents living inside the M60 motorway ring with detection devices, the gigantic cost of administering the scheme or indeed the massive disruption it would cause. Not surprisingly many other cities like Birmingham, Derby, Leicester and Nottingham have rejected the Government's TIF proposals (dare I say blackmail?) as far too expensive and likely to drive business away. Indeed Nottingham has suggested a simple £350 annual tax on all city centre car parking spaces which would cost a tiny fraction to administer compared with the Government's proposals but would probably obtain the same result.

We are not against a sensible congestion charge of say £5 every time a motorist drives into the city centre triangle bounded by the Mancunian Way, Great Ancoats Street and perhaps Trinity Way (A6042) which would be simple to administer, probably provide as much income and free Manchester city centre from congestion.

For instance, I live in the Metropolitan Borough of Stockport where members of all three parties on the Council are strongly against the Congestion Charges and

TIF Bid. Half Stockport is inside and half outside the M60 circle, so half the residents would have to pay to go from one part of the borough to the other. (The same applies to several other Greater Manchester Metro Boroughs). But this does not stop half-page banner headlines saying “*What would you say to extra seats on local trains at peak times through Stockport?*”? The *Stockport Times* had a four-page outer cover supplement headed “*Investment planned across Stockport*” giving details of virtually each individual bus route in the borough with the route numbers and districts served highlighted in heavy print saying that these services will be increased to every ten minutes etc. It is only when you look carefully at the small print that you notice it says “**EXAMPLES of how this (the TIF Bid) COULD change buses in the district**”. Similarly the railways “*More trains, more carriages, more platforms will be provided*” yet there is no likelihood that most of these things would happen. **We have now discovered that the latest advertisements costing something like a further £1 million are in fact funded by the Department for Transport in order to give further information prior to the Referendum in December. However, in fact, the adverts are not so much factual but pure propaganda asking people to vote Yes to the TIF Bid.**

London introduced a sensible congestion charge in a small area consisting of the City of London square mile plus part of the West End. When this had been made to work satisfactorily the area was extended to include a little more of the West End. Manchester should do likewise with a congestion charge in the real city centre possibly to be extended when working smoothly.

If the present proposals go through it will lead to endless squabbles as each of the ten boroughs in Greater Manchester tries to obtain its piece of the cake. Gigantic sums will be swallowed up in administration and we will only receive new trains, buses, bus/rail stations etc which other parts of the country obtain in the normal way. It would be a grand day for bureaucracy but an awful day for businesses (and genuine jobs) and the public. Passengers on public transport will certainly not obtain many of the suggested improvements stated in the advertisements. The advertisements about the congestion charge and the TIF Bid are a GREATER MANCHESTER SCANDAL. **We strongly advise everyone to vote against the TIF Bid in the December Referendum** because we suggest the proposed scheme is unworkable and would put Greater Manchester in debt for decades to come.

Tram-Trains

In our last newsletter magazine we wrote at some length about Tram-Trains and the government’s announcement that an experiment would be conducted on the 37-mile-long Sheffield, Penistone, Huddersfield line which we considered quite absurd as it was a most unsuitable line. We pointed out that Sheffield trams and trains have no link and it would cost millions to provide a bridge or underpass across a busy main line to connect them. Moreover the Sheffield trams have low platforms and the trains have high ones. As we indicated, the obvious

choice would have been Manchester to say Knutsford on the Mid-Cheshire line where connections already exist at Altrincham. Knutsford is the busiest station along that line and most of the passengers from there go to Manchester either by changing to a tram at Altrincham or by going the long way round via Stockport.



We make no apology for returning to the subject as more details have come to light. Barry Graham, Operations Director for Northern rail says “This is a learning process for the rail industry.” What utter rubbish! The rail industry is already operating many successful tram-trains on the continent and Heavy Rail and Light Rail already use the same lines on the Tyneside Metro between Gateshead and Sunderland. The highly respected magazine *Tramways and Urban Transport* says the Department for Transport as “lead funder” wants to start the experiment in 2010 and spend £15 million on improving the track (why?) and lowering the platforms for the low floor tram-trains although those same vehicles will not use Sheffield’s tram tracks for the first few years (if ever!). The DfT is also to spend £9 million on five (*just five*) new tram-trains to replace ‘Class 142 & 144 Pacers’ currently running the service. On being questioned however, Mr Graham was forced to admit that the tram-trains would have up to 36 fewer seats than most of the trains they would replace and that is without putting toilets in the tram-trains which all the existing trains have. So much for improvements! He did suggest that busy services might have two tram-trains coupled together but from where is he going to get the extra units? The suggestion is that the new tram-trains could save four minutes on the 70 minute journey and result in lower wear on the track so why relay it?

The final ‘spanner in the works’ comes from Northern’s announcement that they are introducing a new Nottingham to Leeds train service every hour via Sheffield, Meadowhall and Barnsley, the last two stations being on the Penistone line of course. So how are these to run if the platforms have been lowered?

All the transport technical press have pointed out the total folly of the DfT’s tram-train announcement and we now understand that Blackpool is seeking non-

government money to study the possibility of running tram-trains which would certainly be more sensible than the Penistone line, but not nearly as sensible as say Manchester to Knutsford where all stations including those used by Metrolink between the city and Altrincham have high platforms.

We have long suspected that there is nobody at the DfT who has the slightest idea of how to run railways or any other public transport for that matter, but we are now deeply concerned by the way Northern Rail management is endorsing the government's sheer stupidity. One press correspondent suggested that the Penistone Line had been chosen because the DfT wanted the experiment to fail; another suggested it was the only way the government would allow Northern to have new trains. Whatever the reason, if the madness persists it will cost a lot of money and prove nothing. **Please may we have a handful of new trains instead, to relieve the chronic overcrowding on our services in the Manchester area?**

HERE WE GO AGAIN!

I ended my last 'Chairman's Chat' by thanking all members who had written to our Transport Minister, Ruth Kelly, about the disgraceful position regarding our lack of trains and suggested that there were indications that the pressure on the Department for Transport was beginning to tell. My grounds for saying this were that Ruth Kelly was showing distinct signs of beginning to understand a little about the transport needs of the country. She had gone against all previous DfT announcements and suggested we might look again at electrification of more railway lines (hooray at last!), had agreed to a new fleet of trams for Blackpool plus track renewals, and even approved four more new trams for Manchester amongst other things. Even Tom Harris the Rail Minister was showing signs of sympathy for rail passengers. Clearly we cannot have Transport Ministers who understand transport or Sir Humphrey would lose his power so they had to go and go they did.

Ruth Kelly decided to leave her frustrations behind and spend more time with her young family and we wish her well. We understand that Geof. Hoon, one time Defence Minister, is the new Minister for Transport so we start all over again. As I ended last time -watch this space.

TONY FAWTHROP
Hon.Chairman GMTC

Amicable and progressive meeting with leaders of PTA

Following the local elections last May and the subsequent nominations of councillors by the ten Greater Manchester boroughs to be members of the Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Authority (GMPTA), approximately half of the 33 members are new to the Authority. As many of our members

know Councillor Matthew Colledge (Conservative, Trafford), and Councillor Keith Whitmore (Liberal Democrat, Manchester Levenshulme) are the new Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively of GMPTA. Your Chairman, Tony Fawthrop and Publicity Officer Peter Garvey had a useful meeting of over an hour with them, having taken along a CD with which they were able to give a slide show. It contained over 70 slides with captions illustrating many of the matters which were felt to be wrong with transport facilities in Greater Manchester. We understand that the CD was duly passed on to officers of the Authority for their comments on the items illustrated. We await their response. One of the matters we raised was the need for a bus shelter at the busy Urbis stop on Corporation Street. This has already been agreed to and we await its erection in due course. Councillor Whitmore also said he felt the previous method of holding Local Transport Public Forums was not entirely successful and asked for our ideas. We have suggested the need for Local Public Meetings attended by councillors and officers at which the public could ask questions, make suggestions and receive an answer immediately if known, or in due course if research was required.

Your Chairman and Publicity Officer were courteously received and it was suggested that another meeting should be held in due course. This was certainly quite a change from the meeting held with the former Chairman and Vice-Chairman of GMPTA.



What it is then and where is it? If you travel into Manchester by train on the Oldham Loop you'll have recognised the mast—but you'll have seen it from the other side. Beneath this giant umbrella is the Metrolink station at the Gateway Transport Interchange for Central Park (the business park at Newton Heath). One of our members from Failsworth kindly e-mailed us a few photographs he'd taken and suggested we publish them together with his comments on the facility.



‘When I first saw this expensive architectural statement I expected the umbrella would conceal a state-of-the-art facility for passengers to wait. Not so. For a start, the platforms are in an elevated position. A lift shaft has been provided to each platform, but it’s to be hoped both lifts will always be working because if not you’d think twice about tackling the stairs if you’ve a dodgy ticker. If you’re in a wheelchair, mate, you’ve had it. There’s around 50 steps (that’s almost the same as between the old Fairfield Street entrance to platforms 13 and 14 at Piccadilly which has 51—and I used to get out of breath running up those years ago).

I’m no civil engineer but surely the ground on either side of the line could have had a gradual rise incorporating a footway up to platform level. It would have avoided the need for lifts together with their maintenance and made the station fully accessible at all times.