

**Response to May 2018 Timetable Consultation for Southport Manchester Services by
Southport Rail Transport Forum and Ormskirk Preston & Southport Travellers' Association**

7th July 2017

In representing passenger interests West of Wigan, SRTF and OPSTA would like to thank Northern for the opportunity to respond directly to this consultation. We recognise and appreciate:

1. The efforts by the Northern team, using its existing resources, to create a service plan that goes some way to meeting passenger requirements for direct services to Bolton and the south side of Manchester. Strict compliance with the Train Service Requirement (TSR) would have failed to do so for over 60% of customers travelling beyond Wigan.
2. Northern's commitment to the development of a business case in support of the identified solution for a full direct service to the south side of Manchester by October 2018.

Our response is thus limited to those key issues and service shortcomings where we believe a solution should be feasible within operational and resource constraints, and without re-working of the overall route and timetable plans (aka 'the Manchester plan').

Since the new timetables were made available, we have conducted a full online passenger survey and augmented this with additional travel pattern data and comment from further travel census checks conducted on platform and trains for various morning services.

Consequently the recommendations and requests made in this paper are based on our examination of the timetables, all of the previously shared research and analysis, and the recent feedback from over 250 rail users on the proposed services.

The full online survey report and set of comments is in Appendices 1 to 4. Added to that we have received a number of comments from businesses in Southport who believe that these changes if they become permanent will have a severe detrimental effect on the Southport economy, which is already facing serious challenges. These are recorded in Appendix 5.

Recommendations

The rationale and justification for the following recommendations is summarised in the following section.

It is recommended that:

1. Alderley Edge (Piccadilly) services go to Wigan Wallgate not North Western.
2. 1 train per hour is routed via Bolton.
3. Piccadilly services call at Deansgate in both directions.
4. An additional commuting service goes to Piccadilly in the morning (ideally 08.xx out of Southport) and from Piccadilly at around 16.15
5. All services call at Meols Cop and Hindley
6. There is a direct airport service on a Sunday.

It is also requested that serious consideration be given to:

7. Providing one additional commuter service to and from Victoria in the weekday peak.
8. More Sunday services and a service for Bescar Lane and New Lane.

Summary of Issues and Rationale for changes recommended to the proposed timetable

In general passengers seek a “balanced service” that offers sufficient capacity on both direct Manchester routes. A number of business travellers stated a “need for both routes”.

With no improvement in journey durations and with generalised journey times about to become a lot longer for the majority, more travellers threatened to switch from train to car or cease travelling than standard industry models would predict. Many explained or justified their alternatives and there is evidence of this happening already in anticipation of the changes.

Monday – Saturdays Peak Hours

Northern’s stated aim to provide services for 80% of commuters to the south side will not be achieved and it may be little over 50%.

We are pleased to see the first two Piccadilly services from Southport and the early morning departure from Wigan retained together with two return evening services. The 17.15 calling at Gathurst will help with a number of passengers specifically requesting this.

However, the previous analysis conducted jointly with Northern and our latest research shows:

- 8.23 Southport service carries close to 20% of commuters to Bolton and south side destinations with at least half boarding before Wigan.
- The evening return journeys are made over a wide time span and the 16.22 Piccadilly service is heavily used, presently carrying up to a third of commuters; 10% of survey respondents gave this as the service they always take.
- AM and PM services proposed do not match a regular working day and many passengers pointed out their variable and flexible work/ travel patterns; many professionals explained why they have to commute outside the recognised peak times.
- Calling at Deansgate on inbound services only will affect almost 20% of all commuters and many flagged this. Furthermore, passenger feedback shows it to be the connection for onward travel to Salford Quays via Metrolink and not solely a commuting destination.
- There will be severe overcrowding on the 2 commuter services each way with passengers adjusting their travel times to take the direct services.
- Victoria line passengers also raised issues of crowding and timings (pre 09.00 arrival and post 17.00 return), and there is a general concern that denial of service for those forced to make connections will be commonplace.
- 5% of commuters West of Wigan travel to Bolton (see below).

Does the service plan for Windermere require a full and exclusive allocation of three Class 769 units and/or could the configuration of diesel units/ service groups be adjusted to enable implementation of recommendations 4 and 7?

Off Peak (and All Days All Hours)

- Up to 40% of journeys to the south side of Manchester are made outside of the peak. The survey response was consistent with this.
- The 9.24 Southport service is the first outside of the peak and carries as many as the 8.23.
- All of the morning services to Piccadilly/Airport will see variable numbers boarding at Southport and frequently at commuting levels (in the forties).
- Many passengers have stated specific reasons for their travel to south side stations including business, longer distance travel, family visits, shopping, sporting and leisure events, and medical treatment.

- Travel to work need is 7 days x 18 hours (or more); today's jobs are not 9 to 5. The same is true for travel to the two Manchester universities.
- All surveys (including AECOM's) find 10-15% or more of those travelling to Manchester are doing so to make a connection at Piccadilly. Travel census data shows that many are tourists and day visitors returning home. Another 5% of all passengers will be going to/ from the airport. Not only will they lose a direct service, they will be denied reasonable and practical connections.

The first four recommendations will lessen the impact and help passengers in this group.

Sundays

From previous discussions we understand contention for train paths is not an issue, hence recommendation 6 is for a service to Piccadilly and the Airport concatenated with another service (similar to current operation).

The following is in addition to 'All Days' travel patterns and requirements above.

- Many passengers stated specific reasons for their travel to south side stations on Sundays. Late afternoon sees a peak in business travel.
- In respect of Sunday services from Victoria it would make more sense in terms of the business and visitor economy for that to be the Leeds service (albeit a slow, stopper that negates any advantage of a direct service). Travellers from Blackburn and East Lancashire would surely choose a connected route via Bolton provided it was available.
- A later final service is an improvement but the first service should be earlier. Is there not scope to bring empty stock movements into service?
- Trains pass through Bescar Lane and New lane without stopping but both are in walking areas and serve nearby nature reserves. Why can they not be given a weekday level of service?

Connections

Further to the 20% of survey respondents threatening to stop using the train, a third of respondents said they will use the train less often following the withdrawal of a direct service.

8% of respondents disclosed a mobility issue or disability that made direct train services their only practical mode of travel.

- Both Hindley and Salford Crescent are unsuitable stations for the many forced to change services and wait times look either too short to be reliable or too long to avoid passenger discomfort.
- There is an anxiety that tight connections cannot be assured and our reading of the timetable is that the west bound connection at Salford Crescent is often more than 30 minutes.
- Crossing between the Wigan stations to make a 13 minute connection will also be difficult and impractical for many travellers, and entails a major road crossing.
- There appears to be a 23 minute turnaround at Wigan for the Alderley Edge and Stalybridge services which should give ample time to do this at Wallgate.

Wallgate is at least a recognised interchange with same platform connection and facilities, and the first recommendation is made as an essential mitigation until full through services are restored.

Calling Patterns

- All trains stopping at **Gathurst** is welcomed, and addresses a repeated complaint.
- **Bolton** is an important destination for workers and students. There is also a commuting flow, notably health workers and some students, from Bolton to West of Wigan destinations. Many day visitors to Southport travel from Bolton or via this station from Blackburn and East Lancashire. The second recommendation would address this.
- With a lengthy layover time at Southport (20+ minutes) during the day, there must be operational scope for all services to call at **Meols Cop** where traffic flow is two way and unfulfilled demand exists. This is managed during the peak period. We understand the proposed timetable matches the TSR which means a consequential degradation of service compared to the current timetable. Recommendation 5.
- Why do all services not call at **Hindley**? It makes more sense for all Southport services to do so than other Wigan – Manchester services. Recommendation 5.

Conclusion

It is recognised that Northern achieved a breakthrough in the service proposition to mitigate the adverse impact on Southport-Westhoughton corridor passengers from timetable changes deriving directly from the franchise agreement (TSR), however, there is scope for further improvement that should be commercially beneficial and achievable without changing a complex network plan.

The recommendations for changes and improvements have been limited to what is intended to be a realistic and easily delivered interim position.

It is, however, clear from all of the research and evidence that the May 2018 timetable proposals (even if they incorporate all the changes advocated) will still represent a severe derogation of services between Southport and Wigan to the south side of Manchester.

This response is made in the knowledge that a full direct service is technically feasible using Class 769 trains and in anticipation of an approved investment in the extra leasing costs needed to bring these into service on this route by October 2018 – thus minimising the break in direct services.

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