

Briefing Note

Investment to protect direct rail service between **Southport** and **Manchester Piccadilly**

Prepared by

Southport Rail Transport Forum
Ormskirk Preston and Southport Travellers Association

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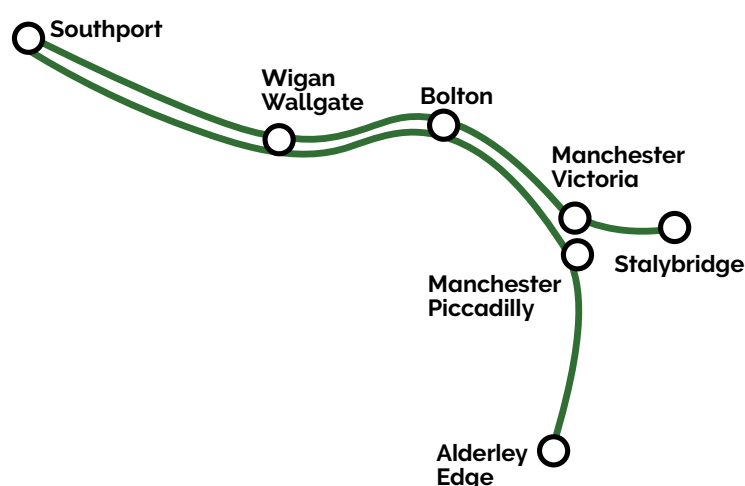
1. This briefing note summarises the case for investment in up to three Class 769 bi-mode trains that will replace equivalent diesel units and enable direct rail service between Southport, Bolton and Manchester Piccadilly to be restored by December 2018. The case has been developed by SRTF and OPSTA and is based on very sound evidence.

2. This existing essential service will be cut from May 2018 as part of Arriva Rail North's (Northern's) new timetable plan to run all Southport trains through Manchester Victoria (except for a couple of weekday peak hour trains), in spite of vigorous community opposition and (in the written opinion of Transport Focus) a lack of meaningful consultation.

3. The current services are shown below; from May 2018 the Piccadilly and Airport service will be lost. Beyond Victoria one train an hour will form a slow, stopping service to Leeds and the other train every hour will follow a very indirect double-back route to Blackburn.



4. Using the Class 769 trains will allow a new Stalybridge – Wigan – Alderley Edge service to be extended to Southport, thereby ensuring direct rail links with Bolton and Manchester Piccadilly every day. Northern is due to take delivery of eight Class 769 trains in early 2018 and these extra units will be identical. The desired route is shown below: trains will run out to Southport passing through Wigan Wallgate instead of turning round at Wigan North Western. Both Victoria and Piccadilly are served and there is a direct link with Bolton that helps to maximise revenue and optimises use of train capacity on the very busy Bolton corridor.



5. The current direct service from Southport and West Lancashire to Manchester Piccadilly via Bolton is used by over 1,000 commuters every week day, giving them access to jobs in the economic hub of the North West. Business connections with professional services in south central Manchester and the research and innovation centres at the major universities foster enterprise development in Southport and West Lancashire. It is the busier of the two Manchester routes through the day and is vital for traffic coming out of south Manchester, especially tourists and visitors heading towards Southport.

- 6.** There is real concern that without the direct rail link with Piccadilly, Southport and its neighbouring communities will be poorly placed to take advantage of post-Brexit opportunities. Losing this link will also make Southport more vulnerable to the problems of social exclusion and depressed economic activity that beset coastal towns.
- 7.** Around 60% of passengers from stations west of Wigan use this route compared with services towards Victoria. Cutting the service will discourage commuters and businesses from basing themselves in the area, hit employment in the visitor economy of Southport and encourage more people to use cars to get into Manchester. It will hurt the Manchester economy because the city will lose access to professional and high skilled personnel, and there will be an inevitable fall in leisure traffic.
- 8.** Forcing large numbers of passengers to change at Salford Crescent or Wigan to reach south central Manchester presents significant safety and reputational risks to Northern, and is likely to breach several of the nine protected characteristics contained in the Equality Act 2010.
- 9.** The loss of a direct airport service is acceptable so long as there is an easy connection at Piccadilly.
- 10.** There is strong cross-party agreement among the MPs of the affected constituencies that this is a very serious matter. Local authorities and transport authorities in the affected areas also recognise this issue and support efforts to put it right. Business leaders are behind the campaign to protect the direct link with Piccadilly.
- 11.** Northern have indicated they will endeavour to increase the number of direct Southport to Piccadilly trains but only as circumstances permit and without guarantees. This is unacceptable.
- 12.** Damien Moore MP encouraged the rail passenger groups to produce their own business plan, based on data and information gathered by them and in co-operation with Northern. The results are striking.
- 13.** If Northern does not make this investment their loss of revenue is estimated at £650,000 per year, while the economic loss in the affected localities is conservatively estimated to be more than £2 million per year.
- 14.** On the other hand acquiring the Class 769 trains is expected to increase Northern's annual revenues by £250,000, while the increased lease and operating costs of the trains over those they will displace is estimated at around £280,000 per year. So the impact is broadly neutral for the franchise.
- 15.** This business case therefore presents a strong financial and economic justification for the modest investment required, with a benefit to cost ratio of over 10:1.
- 16.** The business case also recommends that the planned Southport to Leeds service should, by 2020, be upgraded to a Northern Connect fast, limited stop, lower frequency service.
- 17.** The Secretary of State for Transport is asked to facilitate urgent validation of the business case through the necessary channels and, upon approval, sanction the required steps to achieve the earliest possible delivery into service of Class 769 (or equivalent and suitable) rolling stock that will enable direct rail service between Southport, Bolton and Manchester Piccadilly to be reinstated. The target date is no later than December 2018. The costs involved are likely to be less than £280,000 per year (allowing for rolling stock lease charges, training and associated activities).

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