

2024 AUTUMN

WIRRAL TRANSPORT USER

The Newsletter of the Wirral Transport Users Association

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Rail Developments

LIVERPOOL BALTIC STATION



The likely appearance of the finished Liverpool Baltic station, as seen at platform level - [From Merseytravel website- Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0]

After *Headbolt Lane*, the next new station planned for the *Merseyrail* network will be *Liverpool Baltic*, located near Parliament Street and the Anglican cathedral. This station will be on the site of the former *St James* station, which temporarily closed in 1917 (but never reopened), between *Liverpool Central* and *Brunswick* on the Hunts Cross line.

According to *Time Out* magazine, the new *Northern Line* station will serve the UK's 'coolest neighbourhood' – and the world's 11th coolest.

Detailed design work for the station is currently underway. Being situated in a

deep cutting, the new station will have to meet all the requirements for underground stations. The original cutting was made wide enough to accommodate three tracks between the platforms- the two tracks serving the platforms had a parallel by-pass track running between them (which was removed after the former station was closed). This has meant that the new station can have platforms fulfilling modern width specifications without major widening of the cutting.

Plans for *Liverpool Baltic* station include step-free access from street to train, passenger waiting facilities, fully accessible

passenger toilets, secured monitored cycle parking and links to an enhanced local active travel (walking and cycling) network. At the time of writing, *Merseytravel* is conducting a 4-week public consultation on the design of the new station.

Initially, the opening date was given as 2025. This was later postponed until 2028 but, as one of the LCR mayoral election pledges, has now been brought forward to the end of 2027. Construction work is due to start next year.

Other computer-generated images of the new station are available at <https://www.liverpoolcityregion->



The likely appearance of the finished Liverpool Baltic station, as seen at ground level – [From Merseytravel website- Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0]

ca.gov.uk/liverpoolbaltic which includes a link to a CGI Teaser video.

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INTRODUCTION OF CLASS 777s

By the middle of the year, all the new Class 777s had been delivered to the UK. Roll-out across the *Merseyrail* network has been continuing over the last few months, with *Wirral Line* services now almost entirely in the hands of the new units.

On the Southport-Hunts Cross line, the Class 777s have been gradually taking over operations as training of Southport-based drivers allows. Nine Class 507s are being retained to work in pairs on busy trains during the peak and over the summer holiday period. However, all Class 507s should be gone well before the end of the year.

The surviving operational Class 507 units can also be seen travelling to and from Birkenhead North depot for maintenance, with withdrawn trains also going to Birkenhead North to be hauled from there to Newport for scrapping.

Operation of 8-Car Trains

The Class 777s have been built at two Stadler factories, one in Poland and one in Switzerland, with odd-numbered units

coming from the Polish factory and even-numbered ones from the Swiss plant. All seven of the battery-equipped trains for the *Headbolt Lane* line were built in Switzerland (see below).

It was reported that there were problems coupling together trains from the different factories to work in pairs. This teething problem seems to be resolved with odd-even pairs now seen in passenger service on the Ormskirk line.

For a time, on the Wirral lines, the service would be provided by only odd-numbered trains on one day and by only even-numbered trains another day. It appears this arrangement was intentional rather than accidental, probably so that *Merseyrail* could be sure any two trains would couple together successfully in the event of a train failing in service.

8-Car Stop signs have been appearing at more stations on the Chester line recently, a pre-requisite before 8-car trains can operate in passenger service.

Headbolt Lane Line

To avoid the need to extend the electrified third rail from *Kirkby* to *Headbolt Lane*, seven of the new Class 777s have been equipped with traction battery packs. As reported in the previous issue, there have been considerable problems with the changeover from third rail to battery operation near *Fazakerley* station, with initially only an hourly service provided and the frequency of trains being reduced for a period of over six months. These problems now seem to be largely

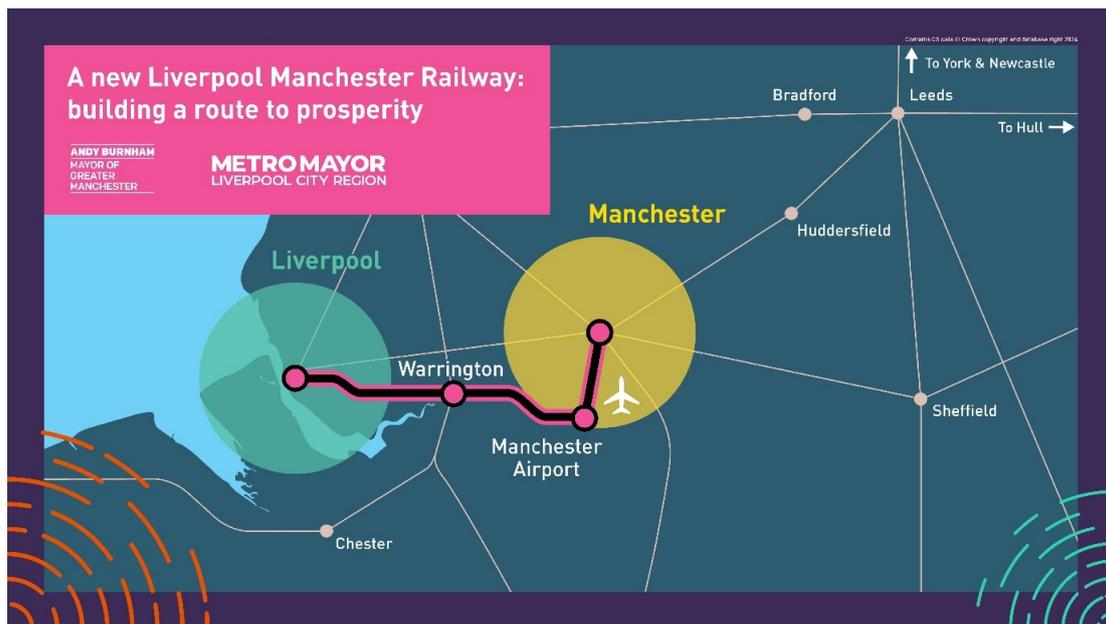
resolved, with a 4 trains-per-hour service to *Headbolt Lane* now scheduled.

Using funds recovered from train manufacturer *Stadler*, *Merseyrail* is offering weekend travel from *Headbolt Lane*, *Kirkby* and *Fazakerley* to *Moorfields* or *Liverpool Central* for just £2 return and £1 return for children. The offer is described as a goodwill gesture to thank passengers for their patience whilst the new rail fleet was being rolled out on the line, but also with the intention of attracting new and returning custom.

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FUTURE RAIL PLANS

A) New Liverpool to Manchester Route



The potential route of a new Liverpool Manchester Railway - [From Merseytravel website- Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0]

On the 200th anniversary of the formation of the original *Liverpool and Manchester Railway Company*, the Mayors of Greater Manchester and Liverpool City Region, Andy Burnham and Steve Rotherham, announced the formation of a new *Liverpool-Manchester Railway Board*. The function of the Board would be to plan and build a new, high-speed rail line between Liverpool to

Manchester. This would run through new stations at *Warrington Bank Quay* and *Manchester Airport*, connecting the Investment Zones in LCR and Greater Manchester via prime development sites. The route of the line would avoid the current rail bottleneck between Salford and Oxford Road. The aim is to maximise the connectivity and the

economic and social benefits for the areas of LCR and Greater Manchester.

This announcement comes after the scrapping of the northern legs of HS2, following which the Government invited the two Mayors to advise on the best solution for improved connectivity between Liverpool and Manchester, as part of the *Northern Powerhouse Rail* scheme.

As part of the announcement, the two Mayors set out their preferred options for improving the rail infrastructure in and between the two cities. There would be transformational investment in the

city centre stations in Liverpool and Manchester Piccadilly, with the latter gaining a modern underground station linking with the route eastwards to Leeds and Hull.

As originally proposed, under the Government's *Integrated Rail Plan*, the line would be routed over the little used freight line between Ditton Junction and Warrington, past the closed Fiddler's Ferry power station. Steve Rotherham has been highly critical of this proposed route to Warrington Bank Quay station, but which alternative route might be taken is unclear.

B) Liverpool Central Station



A possible design for a new development at Liverpool Central station, as seen at ground level - [Credit LCR CA- Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0]

Ambitious proposals are being developed by Liverpool City Region Combined Authority for the regeneration of *Liverpool Central* station and the surrounding area encompassing Renshaw Street, Bold Street and Ranelagh Street. From a transport perspective, the aims are to resolve the "current capacity issues" which cause overcrowding of the platforms at the current station and also to provide an enhanced gateway to the city centre.

Liverpool Central is the busiest station in the city with, in 2022-2023, 11.4 million entries and exits, a little ahead of *Lime Street* which had 11.1 million. However, both numbers are still well down on the pre-Covid figures of 16.5 million and 16.0 million in 2019-2020.

Under a £1 million tender exercise, the LCRA has been seeking architects to draw up designs for this huge regeneration project. Some artist's impressions were released in late May. The plans include an underground walkway to *Lime Street* station.

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NEW AVANTI TRAINS

Class 805 "Evero" Introduction

Avanti has brought the first of its new Class 805 "Evero" trains into service on the Holyhead-Chester-London route from

the start of the national timetable change on 2 June. These 5-car trains are overhead electric-diesel bi-mode trains built by *Hitachi* at Newton Aycliffe near Darlington. There are two explanations

for the name: 'EV' is said to highlight the improved environmental credentials of the new fleet, whilst 'e vero' means 'it is true' in Italian. *Avanti* is 30% owned by *Italian State Railways*.



Evero unit at Chester station



Lowered (inactive) pantograph at Chester station. (It is raised to access power from an overhead electric line)

This bi-mode capability means the *Everos* can draw power from the overhead electric line between Euston and Crewe, before switching to diesel for the journey on to Holyhead. The Class 221 *Super Voyagers*, which the *Everos* are replacing, ran on diesel throughout the entire route. Some of the released Class 221s are being redeployed to bolster services on the *CrossCountry* network.

Another important difference between the train classes is that the Class 805s do not have tilting capability which would have enabled faster travel on curved sections of the route between Crewe and London. In consequence,

they are limited to a maximum speed of 110 mph on this section, as against 125 mph for the *Voyagers*. However, the new trains can partially compensate with better acceleration, which is sufficient to maintain the current timings, albeit with less recovery time. Work is also in progress to raise speed limits at some locations.

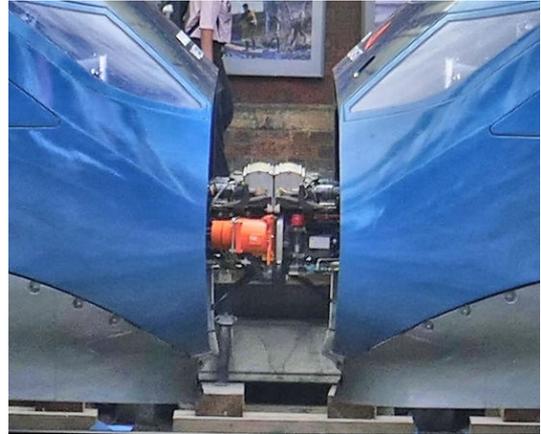
Although the number of coaches is the same on both trains, those on the *Everos*, at 26 metres, are about two metres longer. This extra space and other layout changes enable an increase in the number of seats per train from 256 to 299. Not only that, but more seats at tables can be provided. Compared with earlier trains of similar design, the 805s have a heavier design of bogie on the intermediate cars giving a better ride, and more comfortable seats.

Pre-Covid, there was an hourly service between London and Chester, which was substantially cut back during the pandemic. From the next national timetable change in December, when more of the new trains will be available, *Avanti* plans to start stepping up the service back to the pre-Covid hourly level. However, no date has been given for resumption of the full hourly service.

Currently, Chester and Holyhead services are operated by train crews from Liverpool or Manchester. This arrangement can mean that in the event of service disruptions, train crews run out of time and are unable to complete their rosters, so causing North Wales services to be cancelled. *Avanti* is planning to establish new train crew depots at Crewe and Holyhead which, when operational, should reduce cancellations on the line. Perhaps not surprisingly, the line had the worst cancellation rate of any *Avanti* service in the past year.



Evero unit with nose cowl removed to allow connection to a second unit



Two connected Evero units showing links attached

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Second Hourly Liverpool-London Service

In addition to the Class 805's, *Avanti* is bringing into service a new fleet of all-electric Class 807 7-car trains, also known as *Everos*. These trains are intended to work the second hourly Liverpool-London service that *Avanti*

plans to start introducing from the December timetable change. Initially, there may only be one extra train a day in each direction. This new service is planned to call additionally at *Liverpool South Parkway*, with use of selective door opening there owing to the short platforms.

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MERSEYRAIL TRAIN PRESERVATION PROJECTS

Class 507 Preservation Project – Update

In the previous issue of the newsletter, plans were reported to preserve one of the venerable Class 507 units; the class and its sister Class 508s have given over 40 years of service on the Merseyrail network. With the introduction of the new Class 777 units, the withdrawal of the last few Class 507 units is due this summer.

The *Class 507 Preservation Society* has been offered the 507001 unit free of charge but it still needed to be found a new home away from the *Merseyrail* network. That new home has been secured with a move now planned to the *Nant Mawr Visitor Centre* at the *Tanat Valley Light Railway* just southwest of Oswestry. Nant Mawr is home to a wide variety of locomotives and rolling stock, as well the UK's largest collection of

industrial monorail equipment (including some used in a James Bond film). The Society has successfully raised the £10,000 required for transport, plus a bit more.

Whilst it is great news that the Class 507 will be saved and welcome at Nant Mawr, the site has no covered storage for the train, so there is still work to do to ensure the train is kept secure for future generations.

Class 503 Preservation Project

Going back much further, before the advent of the Class 507s and 508s, the Wirral Line was operated by trains which were designated as Class 503s. These trains were introduced by the *London Midland and Scottish Railway* in 1938, with more of the same design being built in 1956. The Class 503s were replaced by the Class 508s in 1984/85, with one

of the Class 503s being retained for preservation.

The preserved train has had a very chequered history, initially being retained in a serviceable condition for special workings and then being bought by Wirral Borough Council in 1991. One coach was kept at the *Wirral Transport Museum* from 1996 until 2010, with the other two being sold to a preservation society. In 2010, the three coaches were reunited at the *Electric Railway Museum* on the outskirts of Coventry.

However, in 2017, the Electric Railway Museum announced it would be forced to close and in 2018 the Class 503 was removed to the former Hornby Railways

warehouse in Margate. In early 2024, it was announced that 2 of the 3 coaches would be scrapped, due to their poor condition after being out in the open for many years, with only the Driving Motor coach (DMBS) 28690 retained for a future project. That coach is now stored in the open at the Cambrian Heritage Railways site at Llyncllys south of Oswestry, not far from Nant Mawr.

It is very much to be hoped that the surviving coach can be returned to Merseyside and then restored and exhibited under cover. Could the planned new transport museum in Birkenhead, currently known as the *Transport Shed*, be a suitable location?

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Bus Developments

BUS FRANCHISING

Liverpool City Region

As covered in the previous issue, *Liverpool City Region* plans to be the second city region, (after *Greater Manchester*), to introduce franchising of bus services, starting with the St Helens area in 2026 and completing across the region by end 2027.

All stage-carriage services (i.e. "using a public service vehicle carrying passengers at separate fares, not being an express carriage") operating wholly within LCR are covered by the franchising proposals. Cross-border services, such as Liverpool- Birkenhead- Chester and Liverpool-Birkenhead-Ness Gardens, will continue but be operated under permit schemes similar to those being used for *Greater Manchester* cross-border services.

Another new aspect is that some services currently operated by *Stagecoach* from their Rock Ferry depot

will transfer to the Laird Street site which is currently used by *Arriva*. Some *Stagecoach* employees will also be transferred to Laird Street. Although the services affected are unspecified so far, this is likely to cover services on jointly operated routes, such as the 471/472 from Liverpool to Heswall.

Wales

Subject to approval by the Welsh Parliament, the Welsh Government is proposing to roll out bus franchising throughout the whole country during 2026. Several services which currently operate from Chester and Ellesmere Port to destinations in North Wales are likely to be affected. The present *Arriva* Chester bus depot is in North Wales so it will almost certainly become a base for franchised services.

LCR and North Wales

As far as is known, cross-border services will be outside the scope of franchising. If so, will the existing operators choose

to retain their cross-border services, should they lose their franchised services to another operator?

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HYDROGEN BUSES – NOT SO GREEN?

As previously reported, the first hydrogen buses entered service in LCR on 15 May 2023 on the 10A route between St Helens and Liverpool via Knowsley. However, the buses only stayed in service for three months, before being withdrawn in August due to problems in sourcing reliable supplies of hydrogen.

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority has blamed the hydrogen-sourcing issue on “global” hydrogen supply problems. There are many applications which can switch to using hydrogen– are there too many wishing to switch before increased supplies are available?

It has also emerged that *Arriva*, which has the fuel contract for the route, was

not using 100% “green” hydrogen. “Green” hydrogen is made using renewable energy, thereby eliminating fossil fuel emissions in the hydrogen manufacture. Instead, the buses were presumably running on “grey” hydrogen, which is manufactured from fossil fuels. On a well-to-wheel basis, “grey” hydrogen is considered to be a significantly more polluting fuel than diesel.

It has just been announced (end of August) that a supply of green hydrogen has been secured and the 20 hydrogen buses are expected to return to service in the coming weeks. This is being preceded by a battery refit at no cost to the authority. Some driver training is also taking place.

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OTHER BUS DEVELOPMENTS

Liverpool City Region Bus Network

On 11/07/2024, plans were unveiled for a £110m programme to provide a major boost to the LCR bus network. The money will be used to:

- Purchase dozens of additional zero-emission electric buses, in addition to the 58 already secured
- More than £32m for a brand-new bus and multi-modal transport interchange in St Helens, as part of a wider regeneration programme for the town centre
- Various route improvements, including bringing back bus lanes in Liverpool (discontinued in

2014), with the aim of improving punctuality, reliability and journey times.

There are no immediate plans to bring electric buses to Wirral.

Skelmersdale Bus Link

As mentioned previously, following the failure of the proposal to build a rail link to Skelmersdale, a subsidised bus link was reintroduced between Skelmersdale and Kirkby, calling at *Kirkby* station. With the opening of the new *Headbolt Lane* station, as of 09/06/2024, the 319 service from Skelmersdale has been

diverted to serve *Headbolt Lane* en route and no longer passes *Kirkby* station.

Warrington

Warrington Buses, which currently carry a red and dark blue livery, are owned and operated by the Council. In March, it was announced that the Council will receive £21.2m in Government funding, thereby enabling the entire fleet of diesel

buses to be replaced by 105 electric vehicles. These new buses will carry a yellow livery, similar to the *Greater Manchester "Bee Network"*.

The first of the *Volvo* BZL buses is due to enter service this summer. There will also be a new bus depot, where the buses will be charged using 100% green energy.

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Ferries

Mersey Ferries

It has been a difficult time for the Mersey Ferries over the last few months, with cancellations due to unreliability of the now rather elderly vessels and also due to the appearance of a sandbank off the Pier Head.

This sandbank, the *Pluckington Bank*, is migrating northwards from off Brunswick Dock due to a lack of sluicing, which has meant that on spring low tides there is insufficient depth to allow the ferries to berth at the Pier Head. Spring high tides always come in the middle of the day, (that is how the calendar works), so the low tides 6 hours before and after affect both the morning and evening commuter services. The necessary dredging has now been carried out and assurances given that the ferries will again be able to berth at all states of the tide.

However, this situation could prove to be a recurring problem.

In addition, due to a licensing issue affecting both vessels, services were suspended for two weeks between 25 June and 9 July. A replacement commuter bus service operated instead between Seacombe and Hamilton Square morning and afternoon.

At Woodside, the ferry terminal is still closed for major refurbishment. The new landing stage will be attached to piles sunk into the riverbed like at Liverpool, with the only connection to the shore being a single new linkspan bridge. The earliest the terminal is expected to reopen is summer 2025.

It has been reported that a new ferry will be operating on the river by April 2026.

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Isle of Man Ferries

Ferry services from Liverpool to the Isle of Man have been relocated from the Pier Head to a new purpose-built ferry terminal at Liverpool Prince's Half-Tide Dock, which came into service on 25 June. The Manx Government has bought the site from *Peel Ports* in a 230-year leasehold deal. Construction of the terminal fell far behind schedule, with

the project running £32 million over budget, at a total cost of £70 million.

The *IOM Steam Packet Company* has operated the route from Liverpool to Douglas since its inception in 1830 and today it is still its busiest passenger service. Freight services to the Isle of Man will continue to use the port of Heysham.

LCR Mayoral election transport pledges

New Stations on Merseyrail

During the recent mayoral election campaign, the Liverpool City Region Mayor pledged to provide three additional fully accessible stations on the *Merseyrail* network, with work underway on all three by the end of the decade. These will serve:

- Carr Mill in St Helens – on the Liverpool-St Helens-Wigan line
- Woodchurch on Wirral – on the Bidston-Wrexham line
- Daresbury in Halton – on the Chester-Warrington line

Merseytravel had previously indicated that the business case for a station at Woodchurch was not strong enough unless the line became part of the *Merseyrail* network with more frequent train services. Although it would be called *Woodchurch*, the station will be on the opposite side of the M53 from the Woodchurch estate.

For Daresbury, just beyond the eastern margin of Runcorn, both *Transport for Wales* and *Northern* provide services between Chester and Warrington. As TfW provides most of the stopping services, presumably it is these trains which will call. The precise location of the station at Daresbury is unclear, but is unlikely to be on the site of the previous station closed in 1952.

Since 2017, *Merseytravel* has built two new, fully accessible stations: *Maghull North* in Sefton, and *Headbolt Lane* in Kirkby within Knowsley. Work is also underway to design the new £100m *Liverpool Baltic* station near the Anglican Cathedral – see separate article. If the three additional stations are built, there will be one new station in each of the six local authority areas within LCR – are the three proposed stations more politically

motivated rather than fully cost-benefit justified?

Improved Access at Wirral Line Stations

Merseytravel has announced that a further four stations will have lifts installed to provide step-free access, these being *Aigburth*, *Port Sunlight*, *Rock Ferry* and *Walton*. Total cost of the schemes will be approximately £19m, with the Combined Authority investing £9.5m and a further £9.5m secured via the Government's *Access for All* fund.

It could be a challenge to put lifts in at *Port Sunlight* station without spoiling the appearance of the building.

On the Wirral Line, over the last few years, new lifts have also been installed at *Birkenhead North*, *Meols*, and *Birkenhead Park*. Once the four additional lift schemes are completed, 66 of the city region's 83 railway stations will have step-free access from street to platform.

The LCR Mayor has pledged to ensure all local rail stations are fully accessible by 2030, complementing the sliding step technology on the new Class 777 trains and thereby giving LCR the country's most accessible rail network.

Is it a Tram? No, it is a Bendy-Bus

Another pledge from the LCR mayoral election in May was the introduction of "trackless trams" in Liverpool, similar to the *Belfast Glider*.

"New services will run between Liverpool city centre and John Lennon Airport and to both Anfield and the new Everton stadium at Bramley Moore Dock, for the *Euros* in 2028."

Belfast's Glider is a two-route 15.2-mile bus system using bendy-buses operating every 5-6 minutes along a mix of dedicated and mixed-traffic lanes, with a high number of standees and fewer seats than traditional vehicles. It opened in 2018 at a cost of £100 million.

The proposal has attracted some strong adverse comments from people familiar with the Belfast system, including: "It is the worst public transport system, it's full of antisocial behaviour, overcrowding and not enough seats."

Just before election day, the *Lib Dems* put out an election leaflet in newspaper format which summed up the mayor's plan as: ... "MUTTON DRESSED AS TRAM"

Liverpool did have bendy-buses for a short period over 10 years ago, but these had to be withdrawn as they couldn't get round the corners in the city centre. Having dedicated routes this time, specifically laid out for the buses, seems a step in

the right direction. So, will Liverpool manage to do better second time round and learn from the Belfast experience? We will find out over the next few years.

Most of the above is condensed from a longer article in the Merseyside Tramway Preservation Society News Letter.

Merseytravel Planned Changes

Merseytravel, which has overseen transport on Merseyside from 1986, will be renamed *Transport for Liverpool City Region* (TfLCR). However, many LCR residents think such a rebranding will be a waste of money and the money would be better spent on improving train, bus and ferry services in the Region.

A new tap-and-go ticketing system for public transport will be developed with the help of a £10m grant from the Government. The system will enable contactless payments and have capped limits on fares, as currently provided by Transport for London.

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WTUA

WTUA Excursion Sept 2024



By permission of SVR

By the time this issue of the Newsletter has been published, the WTUA train

excursion on the *Severn Valley Railway*, scheduled for Sat 7th Sept 2024, should have taken place:

A coach to take us from various Wirral pickup points to the SVR terminus at Bridgnorth (in Shropshire). Catching the 12:05pm steam-hauled train to the Kidderminster terminus and returning back on the train to Bridgnorth arriving just after 3:30pm. Leaving us with about 1½ hours to look around the town centre, giving us a chance to see its famous cliff lift.

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WTUA AGM 2024

Our latest WTUA AGM is to be held on Friday 11th October at *The Merebrook* in Bromborough, next to the railway station, starting at 13:30. The meeting will begin with an illustrated talk given by David Powell, Programme Director,

Rolling Stock at *MerseyTravel* who will speak on **Introducing the new Class 777s**. The talk will describe how the 777s were brought into service on *Merseyrail* and what the future may hold. This will be followed by the AGM.

Have you enjoyed reading our Newsletter? If you are not already a member, why not join us?

We believe in modern public transport systems for Wirral, Merseyside and West Cheshire area. The WTUA has a watching brief over the public transport operations in Wirral and their connections to the rest of the country and it represents the interests of transport users in the local area. It is affiliated with *Railfuture* and actively supports *TravelWatch NorthWest*. It is a member of *Liverpool City Region Rail User Group*, *Mersey Dee Rail User Groups Consortium*, and *CWAC Rail User Group*.

We publish our newsletter once or twice a year. The AGM includes a talk from an expert on some facet of the transport world. We aim to run coach excursions to heritage railways and other places of transport activity or interest once or twice a year.

For more info, see website or ring Brian Grey (see below).

Annual membership- Individual: £8, Couple at same address: £10. Send for an application form to: Brian Grey, 56 Coombe Road, Irby, Wirral CH61 4US.

COMMITTEE DETAILS

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The **WTUA's website** at www.wirraltua.org.uk gives information about the WTUA and it contains photos and videos of some of the previous trips and also copies of previous *Wirral Transport Users* newsletters.

[3/9/24