

2023 SPRING

WIRRAL TRANSPORT USER

The Newsletter of the Wirral Transport Users Association

Train Developments

Introduction of first time-tabled Class 777 service



First public-access day- Class 777 arrived at Liverpool Central from Kirkby

After many delays, the first Stadler Class 777 four-car unit has been brought into operational service on the Merseyrail network. For the first time, on Monday, 23rd January, the train carried fare-paying passengers between Liverpool Central and Kirkby throughout the daytime off-peak period, working in alternation with two of the existing Class 508s to provide the timetabled service.

Having travelled on the Class 777 on that first day, my comments on the experience are as follows:

The ride is exceptionally smooth and quiet- any vibration and noise occurs

only on some sections of the track and so is obviously caused by the track itself. The seat cushions are firm and probably comfortable enough for sitting for up to an hour. However, the width allocation for each seat is less than that provided on the Class 508s. Four 'well-upholstered' passengers sitting in a line across the carriage may well significantly reduce the usable gangway width to the extent that wheelchair passage becomes difficult. Also, a tall colleague has reported that the shaping of the seat and its head-rest is uncomfortable for him and did not occur with the Class 508 seats.

The windows are very wide and passengers in the facing seats are afforded good views of the exterior; the airline seats do have not such a good view, but it is as good as similar seats in trains of other classes. Any concern about overcooling of the interior due to the lack of doors between the carriages would seem to be misplaced- each carriage external-access door is only opened if a passenger pushes the interior or exterior button on the door, so doors are not opened unnecessarily.

Also, the carriages are heated/cooled by an air conditioning system which supplies air from side panels and vents it out through roof grilles. The system takes account of the external temperature.

Lighting is operated in response to sensors, so comes on at night and under bridges and within deep cuttings. However, the light level is not graduated- it is either on or off.

[JA]



Seating with wide windows



Door-operating buttons and platform-flush step



Information panel which cycles between different contents. Note route graphic shows train position

The 777s will be introduced sequentially across the *Merseyrail* third-rail network over a period of approximately a year, in the order:

1. Kirkby line
2. Ormskirk line
3. Wirral north – New Brighton and West Kirby lines

4. Wirral south – Chester and Ellesmere Port lines

5. Southport to Hunts Cross line

The Southport line will be last because of the need to extend the platforms back, cutting into the station concourse, in order to accommodate the longer Class 777 trains (a double unit being 4.15m [13ft 7in] longer than a double Class 508 unit). It is not practicable to lengthen the platforms at

the outer ends, because of the location of the points and signals at the end of platforms 2 and 3. Essentially, when

stopped in the station, the train must be before the starting signal, which in turn must be before the points.



The pictures show Liverpool-bound platforms 1, 2 and 3 at Southport station, with a double-unit Class 777 in the holding siding next to the platform 1 track (left side of left pic). The platform 1 signal is just about in line with the driver's cab. Note the signal for platform 2 (right side of left pic) is much less further out on its platform. The signal on platform 3 is level with that on platform 2 (right pic), just before the points.

The WTUA committee would be very interested to hear members' views of the new trains. Comments can be made by email to the WTUA's email

address at wirraltua@gmail.com or in writing to one of the committee members listed on the back page.

[NPB

Headbolt Lane Station



Main station building in the course of construction as seen from across the Kirkby-Wigan line. Note platforms also far from complete

The new station under construction at Headbolt Lane is located on the existing

Kirkby to Wigan line, about one mile north-east of Kirkby station. It will

provide improved transport links for the Northwood and Tower Hill areas of Kirkby, as well as for Knowsley Business Park. In addition, it will become the new point of interchange between *Merseyrail* Kirkby line services and *Northern* services to Wigan. The new *Merseyrail* Class 777 trains will continue beyond Kirkby station (which will remain open) to Headbolt Lane using battery power, to avoid the need to extend the electrified third rail.

The £80million construction was started in Q1 2022, with opening due later in 2023. Ground preparation works, including embankment widening (to accommodate the new platforms and doubling of the track to Kirkby station), have been completed and construction work on the station itself is now in progress.

[NPB



A draft design for the new station, with the line heading towards Kirkby Station to the left. [Drawing from Merseytravel website – Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0]



Looking south-west towards Kirkby station with the station building on the right

Skelmersdale Rail Link

In 2021, *Lancashire County Council* submitted the *Strategic Outline Business Case* for a new rail link to Skelmersdale to the *Department for Transport*. However, in July, the *DfT* informed *LCC* that the plans would not be considered for further development, as the rail link proposal represented poor value for money.

Press reports indicated that the total cost of the proposal was around £600 million. As described in the last newsletter, this included the building of two new parallel three-mile single-track links to the centre of Skelmersdale, redoubling of the line from Headbolt Lane to Rainford, and two extra Class 777 trains. The two

single-track lines from Skelmersdale would join the Kirkby to Wigan line in different directions, *Merseyrail* trains at Rainford to head west to Headbolt Lane and on to Liverpool and *Northern* trains to head east to Upholland and on to Wigan. The section of route leaving Skelmersdale centre would have involved a viaduct over the M58.

Although there was some scope to simplify the proposal in order to reduce cost, the need for a viaduct over (or tunnel under) the M58 and on towards Skelmersdale town centre would have prevented the cost changes from being anywhere near enough to make a positive business case. A parkway

station before the M58 was considered but, with car ownership low, would not have provided a satisfactory solution.

The *DfT* has said it will now engage with the county council and the *Liverpool City Region Combined Authority* to look into alternative options for improving connections to the town focussing on an interchange(s) with the existing Kirkby-Wigan rail line. One of the options being considered is a bus link between Skelmersdale and the new Headbolt Lane station, for onward connections by train to Liverpool.

Until January 2023, there was no bus link between Skelmersdale and Kirkby, as no operator considered the route to be a viable proposition. However, from the 22nd January 2023, *Stagecoach* has

introduced the 319 service between Kirkby Town Centre and Skelmersdale Concourse (in the town centre) which passes Kirkby railway station and runs every 30 minutes during the daytime and hourly in the evening and on Sundays. It remains to be seen whether there are sufficient passengers for the service to operate without subsidy, as a previous commercial bus service was withdrawn many years ago. It is likely that far fewer people will travel by bus compared to a train service. The SOBC estimated 325,000 journeys a year for a 15-minute interval bus route compared to approx. 1.2 million passengers per year for a half-hourly train, the latter being sufficient to cover its direct operating costs as well as providing a bigger regeneration benefit.

[NPB]

Ellesmere Port – Helsby Rail Link

Prior to electrification of the *Merseyrail* line to Ellesmere Port, there was a regular train service from Helsby to Rock Ferry, more recently shortened to just Hooton in 1985, connecting with the electric trains to Liverpool. Since electrification to Ellesmere Port in 1994, only a vestigial service has operated between Ellesmere Port and Helsby.

Over several years, *Cheshire West and Chester* council developed a *Strategic Outline Business Case* for restoring full passenger services between Ellesmere Port and Helsby. Under the proposal, that section of the line would become part of the *Merseyrail* network, trains running east of Ellesmere Port switching to battery power.

As with Skelmersdale, the SOBC was submitted to the *Department for Transport*, which evaluated the Helsby proposal as a *Restoring Your Railway* fund bid. Again, the submission was unsuccessful, this time due to insufficient evidence of passenger demand.

Helsby now has through trains to Liverpool via the Halton curve and Runcorn. Even though the Ellesmere Port-Helsby scheme would be comparatively low-cost, predicted demand was insufficient to justify a regular rail service. However, considerable housing development is taking place in the Helsby area, so maybe the business case position will improve sufficiently at some time in the future.

[NPB]

Wirral Lines Update

A few months ago, Chester line services ceased calling at Green Lane and

Bromborough Rake stations in order to improve timekeeping. Prior to the

change, if trains outbound to Chester were running late, 'Control' often decided to omit all intermediate stops between Birkenhead Central and Hooton to get the trains back on time. The stations are still served by Ellesmere Port trains, so their frequency of stopping trains has been reduced from 6 per hour to 2 per hour.

The problem is that only one platform at Chester station is available for *Merseyrail* trains to use and only one train can occupy the section of line controlled by the adjacent signal pair (the 'block'). So, a train incoming to Chester must wait for the outgoing train to clear the block before it can proceed into the platform. The day-time service timings give the time of arrival in Chester 3 minutes after the departure time of the previous train, cutting down the platform dwell time to 12 minutes. So, the turnaround at

Chester is very tight and gives little allowance for unscheduled incidents. *Merseyrail* says the normal calling pattern will be resumed when the new Class 777s, with their superior acceleration, enter service.

In August, installation of new passenger lifts was completed at Birkenhead Park station, thereby improving accessibility for people of restricted mobility, e.g. wheelchair users. Opening of the Birkenhead Park facility brought the number of step-free stations in Liverpool City Region to 58 out of a total of 83.

Liverpool City Region is also making a bid for funding to provide lifts at Rock Ferry station, so that could be the next station on the Wirral lines to benefit from improvement work.

[NPB]

Liverpool Baltic Station

Plans for a major new station serving the Baltic Triangle district of Liverpool are now well advanced. In the first half of 2022, *Merseytravel* ran a competition to choose between three names for the station, with *Liverpool Baltic* being the overwhelming winner with 78% of the vote. Crucially, in April 2022 *Liverpool City Region* secured funding for the station, costed at £55 million, from the Government.

As well as being one of Liverpool's fastest growing areas, the Baltic Triangle district is close to the Anglican cathedral, the Arena & Convention Centre, and the waterfront.

The new station will be near Parliament Street, on the site of the former St James station which closed 'temporarily' in 1917, between Liverpool Central and Brunswick stations on the Hunts Cross line. Being situated in a deep cutting, the new station will need to meet all the

requirements for underground stations, hence the high price tag.

As the original station had three tracks, the cutting is wide enough for fully accessible platforms, though the platforms will need to be slightly staggered to meet current standards. Planned facilities include:

- Full-time staffing
- Passenger toilets
- Step-free access to and between both platforms
- Drop-off area outside
- Cycle hub – for 'active travel'
- Two lifts, four escalators and stairs
- Possibly, café or retail offering

There will be no car park, but possibly a few 'blue badge' spaces.

Detailed design work is currently in progress, with the aim of starting

construction in 2024. Given a build time of around 18 months, if all goes to plan, the station could open before the end of 2025.

Footfall is estimated to be initially around 3 million a year but, into the

future, that could rise to 8 million. To put those numbers in context, the equivalent pre-pandemic figure for Liverpool Central (combined Wirral and Northern lines) was around 16 million.



A possible design for the new station, as seen from Stanhope St. looking towards Liverpool Central station. [Drawing from Merseytravel website – Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0]



Looking down into the site of the old St. James station where the new platforms will be built, from Stanhope St. looking towards Liverpool Central station (Jan 2023).

Initially, the station will be served by the present four trains per hour each way on the Hunts Cross line. However, more capacity may be needed in future years, which would involve extending the other Northern Line services from Ormskirk and/or Kirkby (the latter soon to be

extended to Headbolt Lane) beyond Liverpool Central. This would require a new turn-back facility, probably to the south of Brunswick station. An exciting development, if it comes to pass!

[NPB

Borderlands Line – Wrexham-Bidston

As reported previously in WTUA Newsletters, *Transport for Wales* has big plans for the *Borderlands Line*, comprising:

- An increase in train service frequency from one to two trains per hour
- The introduction of new Class 230 trains, based on former *London Transport* D-stock

However, both aspects have been subject to further delay and neither has yet come to fruition.

Frequency Increase

A conflict over track access rights between *TfW* and *GB Railfreight*, which runs the cement trains for *Hanson Cement* at *Penyffordd*, has only just been resolved. Both organisations had submitted bids to *Network Rail* for extra paths backed by investments of around £25 million each. The problem is that the cement trains are too long for the

existing sidings and have to be shunted onto the passenger tracks, which takes around 40 minutes. So, there is no path for an extra passenger train that hour.

After much argument, at the end of November the *Office of Rail and Road* finally ruled that the cement trains could keep their existing temporary paths, which would now become firm contractual rights, and that *TfW* could run its additional trains in all the other hours.

Of the extra 26 paths (13 each way) that *TfW* requested, 24 have been granted. In the proposed timetable, to create a path for the freight train, it is sufficient for one morning train to run non-stop from Bidston to Buckley, with no adjustment in the other direction. However, in the early evening, an extended one-hour gap in each direction will be needed, with no 17.08 from Wrexham Central or 18.06 from Bidston.

That does not mean *TfW* can go ahead and start running the trains as soon as it is ready to do so. For *Network Rail* has identified that safety improvements may be required at certain foot crossings before the 2 trains/hour service can run. At the time of writing, *NR* is still assessing what improvements are needed and when.

As also described in previous *WTUA* Newsletters, the intention is to run 'skip-stop' services alternating with 'all-stop' services; the skip-stop services will have a quicker end-to-end timing which provides flexibility for when unscheduled incidents cause delays. *TfW* have revised the planned stopping stations of these 'skip-stop' services, which will now be Heswall, Neston, Shotton, Buckley, Penyffordd, Gwersyllt, Wrexham General and Wrexham Central, (so the skipped stations will be Upton, Hawarden Bridge, Hawarden, Hope, Caergwrle and Cefn-y-

Bedd) – note that the original plan has changed so that Penyffordd will be served by all trains, with Upton to be skipped instead.

For the longer term, *ORR* has pressed *NR* into making a *Declaration of Congested Infrastructure* for the entire Wrexham to Bidston line, which means *NR* now has a legal obligation to develop a *Capacity Enhancement Plan* for the line. Whilst there is no obligation on any organisation to fund the *CEP*, its creation must surely improve the prospects for securing the necessary finance to enable passenger services on the line to run twice hourly throughout the day.

New Trains

This time last year, *TfW* was expecting to introduce the Class 230s into service in May 2022. A small fire in the power equipment of one of the new trains during test running put paid to this plan. That incident meant a redesign of certain components was needed. These equipment problems have now been very largely resolved.

In another setback however, the manufacturer of the trains, *Vivarail*, went into administration in November. *Vivarail* had been contracted by *TfW* to maintain the trains at Birkenhead North depot. Instead, *TfW* will now undertake the maintenance themselves, but it will take time to sort out the arrangements.

Entry into service of the new trains is not a prerequisite for the enhanced 2 trains/hour (tph) service. Rather, the extra 'skip-stop' trains could be worked by more of the current Class 150 DMUs, or the new Class 197 DMUs being introduced on longer-distance services, should spare units become available. However, *TfW* now say they are planning to introduce the 2tph service only when the Class 230s have entered service.

[NPB

Transport for Wales – Other Rail Developments

Timetables

Transport for Wales is planning a major timetable rewrite for December 2023, to take full advantage of the new trains currently being delivered. Of note for our area, the current Liverpool-Runcorn-Chester trains will be extended hourly to Llandudno throughout the day, calling at all intermediate stations beyond Chester. In addition, the current hourly Manchester Airport-Warrington-Chester-Llandudno trains will be diverted beyond Llandudno Junction to Bangor, calling beyond Chester at all stations except Abergele & Pensarn.

Present connections at Shotton between the Manchester-Llandudno and Wrexham-Bidston trains are poor. However, with the intended 2 trains per hour service on the Wrexham-Bidston line, the planned timetable would generally give one good connection between Heswall/Neston and Chester each hour each way at Shotton. This improvement will be a big step in developing the *North Wales Metro*, to provide an integrated transport network for North East Wales.

Looking further ahead, from December 2024, the plan is that the Liverpool-Llandudno trains will convey a second portion, to be detached at Chester which would then go forward hourly to Shrewsbury with alternate trains extended to Cardiff. Arrangements for these additional services are still under development.

Class 197 trains

Spanish company CAF is building a total of 77 of the Class 197 diesel multiple unit (DMU) trains at its factory at Newport in South Wales, split between 51 two-car and 26 three-car units. The new trains come with doors at one-third and two-third intervals, which will speed boarding and alighting compared with the current Class 175 units. However, the inter-city on-board ambience, which the end door arrangement of the 175s provides, will be lost, as the Class 197 doors open directly onto the passenger saloon. Another difference compared to the Class 175s is that the new units have through-corridor connections between units. Some concern has been expressed over a reduction in toilet facilities to just one per two-car unit – train layouts are always a compromise.

Introduction of the new trains will provide a uniform DMU fleet across all *TfW* services from Chester, apart from the three loco-hauled Cardiff-Holyhead services. The Class 197s come with a maximum speed of 100 mph. With the present mixed DMU fleet, trains have to be timed for the 75 mph maximum speed of the slowest rolling stock. So, because of the raised maximum speed capability of all rolling stock, there should in future be some opportunity for improving the service timings along the North Wales coast line and elsewhere where higher speeds are permitted.

CAF will maintain the Class 197 trains for *TfW* at Chester and Machynlleth depots, and has recently taken over the running of Chester depot in preparation.

[NPB]

Liverpool City Region – Sustainable Transport Settlement

In April 2022, the City Regions received confirmation of their *Sustainable Transport Settlements* from the Government. In Liverpool's case, the

settlement comprised £710 million for 28 schemes over the period 2022/2023 to 2026/2027. The *Liverpool City Region*

comprises the former Merseyside County plus Halton.

Rail schemes in the settlement are:

- Liverpool Baltic station – see separate article
- Rebuild of Runcorn station between 2024-2026
- Expansion of Sandhills station to support the £5.5 billion *Liverpool Waters* development
- Fitting of batteries to all Class 777 units, i.e. an additional 46 extra units (above the originally planned 7 for running to Headbolt Lane on the Kirkby Line).

There is no new funding however for extensions to the *Merseyrail* network, where the dual third rail/battery powered trains could be used. Even though installation of the extra third rail would not be necessary, work would be required to bring stations to the *Merseyrail* standard, e.g. adjusting platform heights and lengthening platforms.

On Wirral, there is also money for *active travel* (walking, cycling, etc.) and green infrastructure as part of a regeneration programme in Birkenhead.

[NPB]

Rail Timetable Changes – December 2022

The December 2022 timetable change brought a major revamp of services to and through Manchester, limiting the number of trains on the 'bottleneck' Castlefield corridor section through Oxford Road and Piccadilly. The aim is to reduce congestion and increase times between train movements in order to improve service reliability. Due to resource shortages, the new timetables will be phased in over the winter.

The principal alterations affecting Liverpool services are:

- Manchester Piccadilly-Sheffield-Cleethorpes services now start back from Liverpool and, together with the Liverpool-Norwich trains, now provide two trains per hour from Liverpool to/from Sheffield via Warrington.
- Prior to the new timetable, there were two stopping services per hour from Liverpool to Oxford Road on the Warrington Central line. Now, one train still runs to Oxford Road but the second terminates at Warrington.

- On the Manchester Victoria route, *Trans-Pennine Express* has reinstated two trains per hour, one of which goes forward to Leeds and Newcastle as before. The second train, which pre-Covid went through to Scarborough, is now diverted onwards from Leeds to Hull. For most of the year, Hull is a more important destination than Scarborough.
- Stopping trains via Earlestown that previously ran through Manchester to Crewe, now terminate at Manchester Airport. The second all-stations train per hour from Lime Street on the Earlestown route, to Warrington Bank Quay, has not been reinstated.

Overall, services out of Liverpool have fared well in the Castlefield corridor timetable changes, compared to those from some other starting points, except that there is no longer the semi-fast service to Manchester Airport which ran pre-Covid.

From Chester, services to Manchester/Manchester Airport via Warrington are essentially unchanged.

The Northwich route retains an hourly pattern, with peak hour extras, but

trains are retimed.

[NPB]

Bus Developments

1Bws Ticket

This is a day ticket which can be purchased on board from virtually every bus operator in North Wales and it can then be used on almost all of the services in that region. The only operator that has elected not to participate is 'Townlynx', so the ticket is not available or valid on their commercial 28 service from Mold to Flint. An adult ticket costs £6, child £4, but holders of English and Scottish concessionary bus passes just pay £4.

The ticket cannot be used on open-top tourist buses, National Express coach services and park & ride services. The ticket extends from North Wales to Chester and Whitchurch, and vice-versa. Although not valid in Powys, The ticket can be used on buses from Gwynedd to Machynlleth and vice-versa (because the

county boundary is on the Dyfi Bridge just north of Machynlleth).

So, a day trip by 'oldies' from Wirral to Barmouth or Llandudno can be made for £4- this must be the bargain of the century! However, careful advance planning of any intended journey is strongly recommended to ensure that there are suitable connections for each stage of the proposed trip. Hopefully, this will reduce the risk of anyone being stranded *en route*, especially in inclement weather.

For more detailed info, see www.traveline.cymru/news/2021/07/15/new-1bws-ticket-for-services-in-north-wales-introduced-by-local-authorities-and-bus-operators/

[AC]

The Fairer Fare

On 18th September 2022, Liverpool City Region Combined Authority introduced a £2 maximum adult single bus fare, which was publicly branded as "The Fairer Fare". The authority said that this capped fare will save passengers up to 13% on every single journey. However, savings are even greater for cross-river journeys which previously cost £3.30 single. There are no constraints on use by time or day of the week. The authority is using nearly all of the £12.3 million from its *Bus Service Improvement Plan* award to fund the scheme.

The scheme covers the whole of the Liverpool City Region and has been

implemented by all the bus operators. In addition, it covers the whole of the Arriva-operated 300 service from Liverpool to Southport via Maghull and Scarisbrick, even though part of the route is outside the Liverpool City Region. It also covers the whole route of the Arriva-operated 487 service from Liverpool to Ness Gardens and Parkgate via Birkenhead, Thornton Hough and Neston, even though the Liverpool City Region boundary is just beyond Thornton Hough.

Although £2 price-capped single fares are also available in neighbouring Greater Manchester, cross-boundary journeys between the two authorities are

not covered by either scheme. Children's single fares (£1.25 at present) have not changed.

STOP PRESS: Between 1st January and 31st March 2023, the Government has funded extension of the scheme nationally outside London.

[AC]

Franchised Bus Services

On 22nd September 2022, Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) announced an order for 50 zero-emission double-decker buses from Alexander-Dennis Limited. This is for the first phase of the franchised 'Bee Network' bus system expected to launch in September 2023.

The electric buses will be built in Scarborough and supported from the *AD24 aftermarket hub* in Skelmersdale. This first phase will be funded from the Government's City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement, with around 300 more electric buses to be delivered from 2024 through to 2027. The new buses are due to operate in Wigan and Bolton where bus franchising will hopefully be rolled out on 17th September 2023. Other parts of Greater Manchester are due to follow in 2024 and 2025.

These new buses will be the first to bear the "Bee Network" branding and will have a distinctive black and yellow design which builds on Manchester's symbolic Bee and Metrolink colours. The same design will be applied to trams and cycles.

A day after the announcement of the first phase, Greater Manchester mayor Andy Burnham stated that the countdown to bringing buses back under local control, for the first time in 36 years, is well and truly on and gathering real momentum. He also expects the 'Bee Network' to deliver something modern and iconic that reflects the first-class transport network it will become. Time will tell!

[AC]

Chester

A new bus service has been introduced between Chester Bus Interchange, Foregate Street and Mold, Ruthin and Corwen. It is the T8 and run by *M and H Coaches*. The last bus to Corwen is 16.19 hrs and 16.15 hrs from Corwen but does not run to the station.

[DH]

Possible cuts to bus services - a national problem

The *Confederation of Passenger Transport* (which represents Bus Operators) has warned that more cuts to bus services - including the complete withdrawal of some routes - could be on the way in April 2023 when Government support for the sector is due to end. The Confederation said that bus operators are currently struggling with reduced passenger numbers together with

soaring fuel, utility and wage bills. The present situation will no longer be sustainable without further support from the Government and / or elsewhere.

Moral of Tale: If there is a bus service near where you live or work, USE IT - even for short journeys. If you don't, it could soon be lost forever!

[AC]

Mersey Ferry Developments

Liverpool City Region has ambitious multi-million-pound plans for the Mersey Ferries, under its 20-year Mersey Ferry strategy, covering both the ferry terminals and the boats. Together, they should secure the future of the Mersey Ferry for many years to come.

Ferry Terminals



The picture above shows the new Seacombe stage and one of its linkspan bridges. The picture on the right shows one of the gangway pistons and the stage end of one of the linkspan bridges



Back in December 2020, Seacombe ferry terminal closed for a major upgrade. The works comprised replacement of the two 130-year-old linkspan bridges, together with refurbishment of the landing stage and terminal buildings. This refurbishment included the installation of new powered gangways which are raised/lowered by hydraulic pistons (as already installed on the Liverpool landing stage). When a gangway is down resting on the ferry, waves will make the ferry rise and fall, so sensors on the gangway then release control by its pistons. On the landward side, the terminal building now houses the *Eureka! Science + Discovery Centre* in addition to a revamped ticket office area.

Eureka! Science + Discovery is designed for children and young people up to 14 years of age, to discover how Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) influence and shape their lives. Its aim is to boost

engagement with STEM subjects and aspiration for science-based careers across the region. The centre is funded by *Liverpool City Region*, as part of its 20-year Mersey Ferry strategy, the *Wellcome Foundation* and *UK Research & Innovation*.

Ferry services at Seacombe restarted on Monday 17 October, with the *Eureka! Science + Discovery Centre* opening its doors from Friday 11 November. The Seacombe Ferry parking facilities remain free only to drivers with commuter tickets; unlike other park-and-ride facilities, other drivers will be charged by the *Eureka Centre*.

Simultaneously with Seacombe's reopening, the Woodside terminal closed after services finished on Sunday 16 October to allow a similar upgrade. Without the additional complexity of the *Eureka!* project, the Woodside upgrade shouldn't take quite as long.

[NPB/GD]

New Mersey Ferry

Alongside the terminal upgrades, in November, *LCR* announced the commissioning of the first new Mersey Ferry for over 60 years. Over £24 million will be invested in construction of the new ferry and also in an extensive upgrade on one of the existing vessels, to improve its performance and reliability. (We understand that budgetary restraints prevented the commissioning of a second new ferry.)

The new greener and more energy efficient vessel will be designed to provide passengers with greater comfort,

accessibility, and an overall improved experience.

Subject to contract, the project is expected to see Wirral-based shipbuilders *Cammell Laird* work with Dutch naval engineering firm *Damen* on building the Mersey Ferry. *Lairds* has a long heritage with Mersey Ferries, having built 15 of the vessels dating back to 1836 as well as helping to maintain the current fleet. *Damen* operate 35 shipyards across five continents. At the time of writing, the split of work between *Cammell Laird* and *Damen* is unclear.

[NPB/GD]

***Friends of the Ferries* will be running a Dock and River Cruise on Saturday 2nd September, 2023. Ring Gordon on 0151 334 2685 for more details.**

Other Matters

Cedric Green – ‘Mr Halton Curve’

It is with great sadness that we have to report the death of Cedric Green on the 19th of March 2022, at 88 years of age. Although a Wirral resident, Cedric was Secretary of the *North Cheshire Rail Users Group* for many years. In that role, he was hugely instrumental in leading the campaign for re-opening of the Halton Curve by his extensive lobbying with *Liverpool City Region*, the *Welsh Assembly*, and at a Parliamentary level. He worked tirelessly for the improvement of local rail services and without Cedric's

enduring tenacity, it is fair to say, the Halton Curve campaign would not have succeeded. He was a longstanding member of the *Wirral Transport Users Association*.

At present, the Halton Curve carries the Liverpool-Runcorn-Chester service. As reported elsewhere in the newsletter, there are plans to extend these trains to Llandudno in December 2023 and to Shrewsbury and Cardiff in December 2024.

[NPB]

Miscellaneous

The Peel Group is seeking tenders for a contract to substantially extend the sidings in its Seaforth container terminal, to enable handling of longer trains.

WTUA Membership Survey

If you returned the Renewal Form tear-off strip when you repaid your membership renewal and you marked your preference items on it, you may have wondered just how much action your committee would take with the indicated preferences. They have, in fact, been used to generate statistics to give us some idea of what interests you have and which of the society's activities you find most useful- see below.

NOTES- In the following statistics, *current memberships* are those who have paid in the Current Year. As explained elsewhere, we keep non-paid former members on the Membership List for one year, unless notified of termination of membership. A *couple membership* is taken to be one membership. For each membership, if preferences were not indicated in the current year or if no form was returned (because the renewal was paid by bank transfer), any preferences given in previous years are used.

The statistics obtained for 2022 are:

Renewal Forms returned by post= 44

Number on Membership List= 78 (Paid 2022 or 2021 and Honorary), of which:
Number with Email Addresses= 52 (of which 8 requested Contact by Post)
Number which have never indicated any preferences= 8.

Number of Current Memberships= 67 (Paid 2022 and Honorary), of which:
Number of Couple Memberships= 12
Number of Honorary Memberships= 3
Number of Organisations= 2

Current Membership (Paid 2022 and Honorary) preferences:

Contact membership by:	Email = 29, Post = 28, Not indicated = 22
Notify of trips:	Yes = 33, No = 17, Not indicated = 28
Transport modes Of interest	Train = 56, Bus = 49, Ferry = 34, Tram = 30, Cycle = 19, Air = 12, Not indicated = 20.
Activities of interest	Newsletters = 58, Trips = 40, AGM lecture = 32, Website = 21, Not indicated = 18.

If you pay your renewal by bank transfer and therefore have no need to return the slip, you could still provide your preferences by email or phone Brian Grey if you want your preferences to be included in future statistics.

[JA]

WTUA AGM 2021/2022

Our latest WTUA AGM was held on Friday 14th October at *The Merebrook* in Bromborough, next to the railway station. The first half of the meeting comprised a very informative illustrated

talk given by Alan Fantom, Chairman of OPSTA, who spoke on *The Power Within*.

All the previous members of the Committee were re-elected and one

member, Alan Cushion, was elected. After which, the Chairman in his report provided a review of transport matters in the region.

A full report of the AGM is available on the WTUA website (see the link is at the end of this document). Any member without Internet access can request a copy from one of the Committee.

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 the Wirral, Merseyside and West Cheshire area. The WTUA has a watching brief over the public transport operations in the Wirral and their connections to the rest of the country. It acts as a pressure group and represents the interests of transport users in the local area. It has representation on the *Merseyside Integrated Transport Forum* and is affiliated with *Railfuture* and actively participate in meetings with *TravelWatch NorthWest*, *Liverpool City Region User Group* and *Mersey Dee User Group Consortium*.

We keep our members up to date on public transport developments with our newsletter published 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- www.wirraltua.org.uk, email wirraltua@gmail.com, or phone Brian Grey on 0151 648 3070.

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

COMMITTEE DETAILS	
Chairman & Rail Matters:	John Ryan— 48 Hornby Road, Bromborough, Wirral CH62 2EG, 0151 334 7723
Deputy Chairman & Chester Area Sec:	Dennis Harrison— 23 St. Chad's Rd, Blacon, Chester CH1 5LF, to harrisondennis747@gmail.com , 01244 371005
Secretary:	VACANT— volunteer required!
Membership Sec:	Brian Grey— 56 Coombe Rd, Irby, Wirral CH61 4US, 0151 648 3070
Treasurer:	Philip Welsh— philip_a_welsh@yahoo.com , 0151 678 4758
Friends of the Ferries:	Gordon Ditchfield— gordonditchfield@gmail.com
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Editorial Team:	Jim Anderson, Nigel Bird

The **WTUA's website** is at www.wirraltua.org.uk. As well as giving information about the WTUA, it contains photos and videos of previous trips and copies of previous *Wirral Transport Users*. The association can also be reached by email - wirraltua@gmail.com

15/2/23