

2022 SPRING

# WIRRAL TRANSPORT USER

The Newsletter of the Wirral Transport Users Association

## Updates

### Liverpool Docks – Rail Connection



*Transferring containers at Liverpool 2 using Ship-to-Shore (STS) cranes in 2018. [PW*

Rail freight servicing Liverpool Docks is on the up. There are two principal types of traffic: imported biomass (wood pellets processed from forests in the SE USA) for Drax power station in Yorkshire which is handled by *Gladstone Dock*, and shipping containers from and to the *Royal Seaforth Container Terminal*. Both have been responsible for the increased activity over recent years.

In 2016 *The Peel Group* extended the port by the construction of *Liverpool 2* Post Panamax container terminal. This is a deep-water container terminal capable of taking very large ships (Post Panamax ships are too large to use the Panama Canal). Its huge Ship-to-Shore (STS) cranes enable the loading/unloading of

containers directly onto/off ships in tidal waters. This avoids the need for gated docks with their fixed draught limit over the gate threshold, tide-limited entry times and passage time in negotiating the gates.

The increasing port activity has been due not only to *Liverpool 2* with its increasing ship and port capacity, but probably also to the shortage of HGV drivers and congestion at Felixstowe port. Some diversion of container ships from Felixstowe to other ports around the country has changed rail container flows around the country generally.

As well as the rail traffic routes to the port described in the last Newsletter,

another has been started- *Freightliner* has introduced a daily inter-modal (container) train to Birmingham Lawley Street for shipping line, *DKT Allseas*.

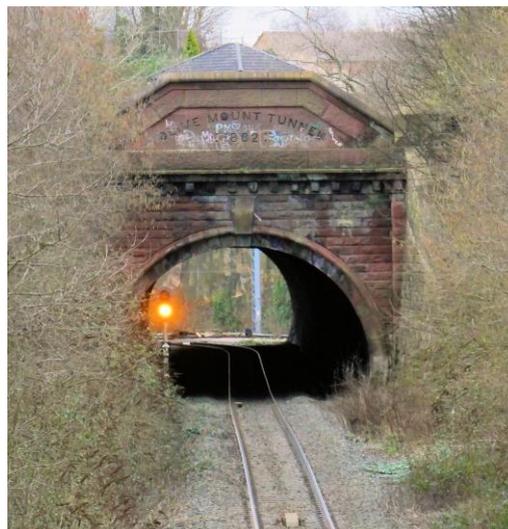
Rail traffic for the terminals had been constrained by a stretch of bi-directional single track line into the terminal at the end of the Bootle docks branch, but no more. In September 2021, *Network Rail* completed the redoubling of this 420m stretch to give double track on the whole dock branch all the way from Edge Lane Junction, near Edge Hill. With this upgrade, a biomass train can arrive at Liverpool Bulk Terminal at the same time as one leaves the *Royal Seaforth Container Terminal*.

...and yet not quite all double track!

The Dock Line meets the Edge Hill-Broad Green main line as a triangle, with two chords making connections eastwards and westwards onto the main line. As originally built, the double track Dock Line joined the main line only by a westward-facing junction. As traffic to the docks increased it became necessary to build access to the main line by an eastward-facing junction: this *Olive Mount Chord* was built as a single track which opened in 1883. However, due to a fire, this chord was closed in 1988.

Subsequently, as dock traffic revived, the half mile chord was reinstated in

2008. So this chord was built single track and remains so.



*The Olive Mount Chord running south-east: it joins the main line just beyond the tunnel*

As discussed in the last Newsletter and also below, a major upgrade of the main Trans-Pennine route via Huddersfield is currently underway. *Network Rail* has now had additional proposals for full electrification accepted by the *Department for Transport (DfT)* including through the tunnels. Even better, this work will include loading gauge enhancement for large containers at the same time. (The loading gauge of a track defines a limit to the size of vehicle (with any load) that can be permitted on that track). Additional capacity will also be provided on the route for freight trains.

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### **The Class 777 trains for Merseyrail**

Two further points have emerged. Of the total project spend, approximately half is on the new trains and half on the infrastructure upgrades. Secondly, all the new Class 777s are fitted with small batteries to move around the depot and to reach the next station in the event of failure. (Services off the electrified network require large traction battery packs.)

Fault-free mileage accumulation with the new Class 777 trains is continuing, Covid permitting, with units that have been accepted by *Merseytravel* then becoming available for driver training. However, we are no further forward in knowing when the new trains will enter passenger service.

As ordered, the Class 777s are being delivered by Stadler equipped for driver-

only operation, ie drivers opening and closing the doors at stations (assisted by TV cameras). Units already in the UK are being sent to Crewe LNW for modification, which is understood to enable drivers to open but guards to close doors. It is not known whether later units are being built to the revised specification.

Mention was made in the previous WTUA newsletter that the new four-car trains are a few metres longer than the current three-car trains and of the need to lengthen platforms at some stations to accommodate double length trains of 8 cars. It now transpires that the platforms at Southport will need to be extended back onto the concourse a short distance, as extension at the other end would be prohibitively expensive due to the positioning of points and signals. As matters currently stand, it will not be possible to complete these works before the new trains enter service, so the plan

is to retain around 10 of the current class 507/508 units to provide peak hour services in pairs on the Southport line for the interim period.



*Class 777 in reversing sidings at Sandhills station having arrived from Kirkdale sheds and about to start a test run to Southport*

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### **Borderlands Line – Wrexham to Bidston**

*The photos in this section have been kindly provided by John Allcock and Guy Barker of the Wrexham and Birkenhead Rail Users Association – for more information about the association, please see [www.wbrua.org](http://www.wbrua.org)*



*At Long Marston ready to go out on the line*



*Inward-facing group of seats show London Transport origins*

During the pandemic, Borderlands trains have been terminating short at Wrexham General rather than running through to Wrexham Central, in order to allow time for cab cleaning and disinfection when the crew changes. During the autumn, the platform at Wrexham Central was extended to accommodate the new 3-car Class 230 trains. Services through to and from Wrexham Central have resumed from the December timetable change, as have the late evening trains and the missing Monday-Friday services in the middle of the day. On present plans, the Class 230s are due to enter passenger service from May this year.

As reported last time, *Transport for Wales* is planning to raise the service frequency on the *Borderlands Line* from one to two trains per hour. The date for the introduction of the additional services is now May 2022. Under the plan, an hourly service will continue as now calling at all stations. In order to provide adequate turn-around time and so improve reliability, the additional intermediate services will operate a 'skip-stop' pattern, with trains calling only at Upton, Heswall, Neston, Shotton, Buckley, Gwersyllt, Wrexham General

and Wrexham Central, giving a journey time reduction of around 11 minutes. The service interval at stations from Bidston to Shotton would be half-hourly, with the 'skip-stop' trains gaining time beyond.



*With its predecessor class in the bay at Wrexham General*

*Transport for Wales* has applied to the *Office of Road & Rail* for the extra train paths needed on the Wrexham to Bidston route and, at the time of writing, the outcome is still awaited. The new service pattern has to fit around the access rights of existing freight users (who run their trains on the same lines during the day).

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## Go-ahead for new Headbolt Lane Station



*Computer-generated image of the new Headbolt Lane station [from Merseytravel website- Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0]*

On 9 December 2021, Knowsley Council Planning Committee granted planning permission for the £80m scheme to build the new station at Headbolt Lane. According to the Liverpool City Region website, work will begin at the site in January 2022, with the opening of the station planned for spring 2023.

To recap, the new station plans include:

- Step-free access throughout the station
- A bus interchange
- Cycle parking
- Links to local cycling and walking networks
- Passenger waiting facilities and toilets
- Approximately 300 park and ride spaces

There will be three platforms, two for *Merseyrail* trains to Liverpool and one

(an off-set extension of one of the *Merseyrail* platforms) for *Northern* trains to Wigan and beyond. The two sets of lines will not be connected, both being terminated by buffers and separated by a short length of platform joining the two *Merseyrail* platforms.

As part of the scheme, the line from beyond Kirkby station to Headbolt Lane will be redoubled - essential if a reliable 15 min interval service is to be run in future.

Maybe one day, they will find the money to redouble from Fazakerley Jn (which is just beyond Fazakerley station) through to Kirkby, which would restore double track on the whole route.

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## **Developments**

Topics are listed in order: projects in progress, firm plans, proposals, ideas.

### **Merseyside HyBus Trial – Hydrogen-Powered Buses**



Computer-generated image of a future Hydrogen-Powered Bus [from Merseytravel website- Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0]

*Liverpool City Region* recently announced an order for 20 hydrogen-powered double-decker buses, as a first step to decarbonising the region's bus fleet. The zero emission vehicles help both to tackle climate change and improve air quality. They will be part of a new generation of hydrogen vehicles designed to be more energy efficient and to cover greater distances between refuelling. *Alexander Dennis Limited* (ADL), a UK based bus manufacturer, has won the contract to build the buses. They will be publicly owned but leased to the operators *Stagecoach* and *Arriva*.

As with the new *Merseyrail* trains, passengers are being given a say in the design of 'their' buses through a series of focus groups. The buses will carry a range of special features for passengers including wireless phone charging and internet access. The vehicles will also have improved accessibility – with increased capacity for wheelchair users, and audio and visual announcements for next stops.

This trial project will deliver the first fleet of Hydrogen Fuel Cell Electric Buses (FCEB) in the North of England and the first Hydrogen Refuelling Station (HRS) of scale.

It is planned that the twenty buses will operate on Route 10/10A – St Helens to Liverpool City centre, refuelling at the *BOC Linde* site in St Helens on a daily basis. Route 10/10A is the busiest route on Merseyside with, pre-Covid, more than two million passenger journeys per year. Subject to final agreement of the project plan, the first vehicles could be delivered by the end of 2022.

In parallel, *Liverpool City Region* is working on a plan for Green Bus Route Corridors, to improve punctuality and journey times, of which the 10/10A route between Liverpool and St Helens will be one. According to *Merseytravel*, pre-Covid the round trip from St Helens to Liverpool was taking 24 minutes longer than three years previously due to increased congestion. Planned measures include traffic signal upgrades, bus priority lanes and more parking/loading enforcement. Better punctuality should both increase patronage and reduce the number of vehicles needed to be available for peak times, so improving the commercial performance of the route.

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## **A Planned New Transport Museum in Birkenhead**

*National Museums Liverpool* is planning a new transport museum in Birkenhead, thanks to the award of £25 million to Wirral Council from the Government's *Town Deal Fund*. With the working title of 'The Transport Shed', the new attraction will be part of the *Docks Branch Railway Line* regeneration scheme and will be located adjacent to the existing Wirral Transport Museum. The two museums will coexist as separate entities with the existing museum continuing to be operated by Merseyside Tramway Preservation Society.

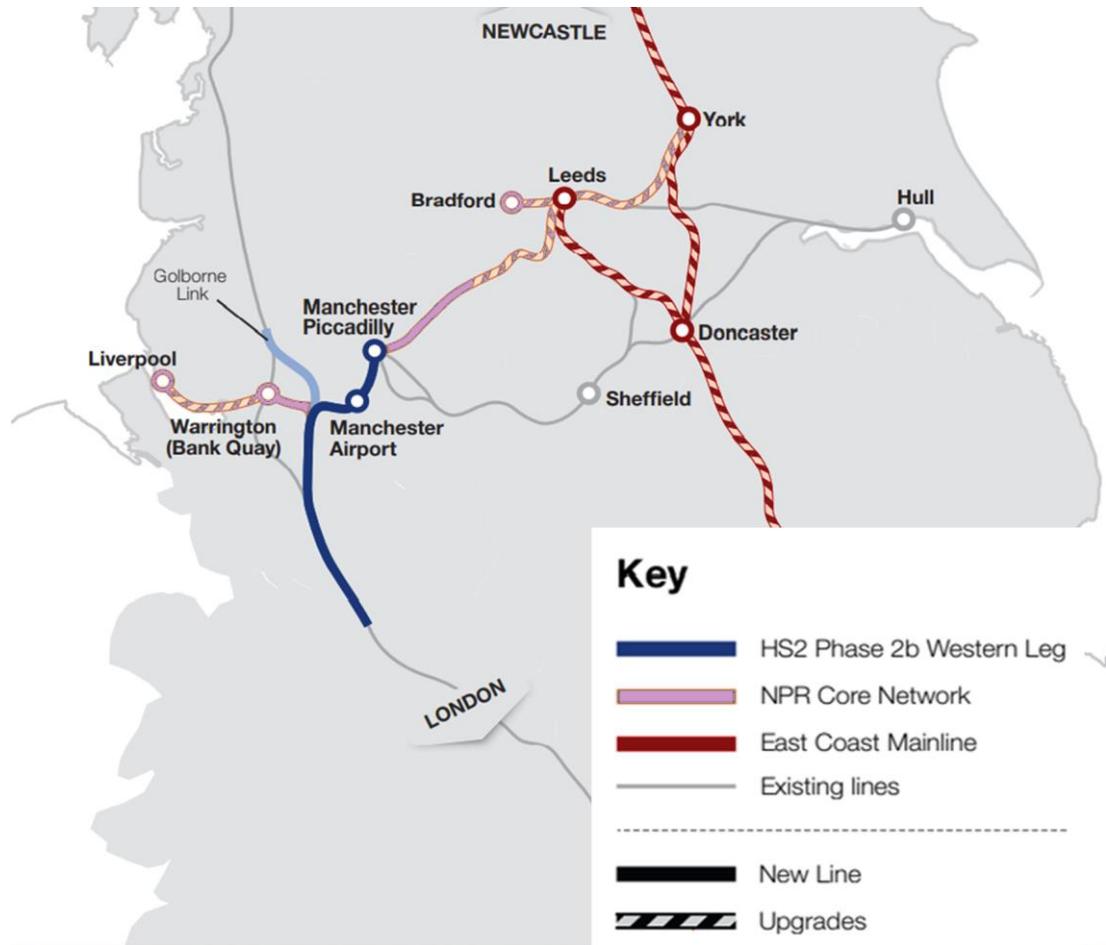
The new 5000 sq metre facility will display objects from the Museum's 250-strong transport collection, described as 'one of the best in the UK', many of which are currently held in the *Large Objects Store* away from public viewing. Exhibits should include the former Mersey Railway steam locomotive 'Cecil Raikes' and old Mersey Road Tunnel pay booths.

With the aim of attracting 200,000 visitors annually, the new museum is intended to support the regeneration of Birkenhead. Work on the *Docks Branch Park*, of which the Transport Shed will be

part, is due to start in 2022 and take two years to complete.

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## Integrated Rail Plan for the North and Midlands



[Map from Integrated Rail Plan document- Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0]

In mid-November, the Government unveiled its *Integrated Rail Plan for the North and Midlands*. The plan has major implications for the long-term future main line rail services in Liverpool City Region and the surrounding area. Two elements within the plan have particular relevance to Merseyside.

First, there is an announcement about the Trans-Pennine Route Upgrade (TPRU) improvement work currently being made to the line from Manchester Victoria to York via Huddersfield, Dewsbury and Leeds. This is not part of HS2 (the planned high speed line between London, Birmingham, Crewe

and Manchester Piccadilly). The news is that the upgrade will now include 25 kV AC overhead electrification of the entire route. As Liverpool to Manchester Victoria and York to Newcastle and Edinburgh are already electrified, the Liverpool to Newcastle services could then run with electric power throughout. Electrification could also benefit Liverpool to Scarborough trains as far as York. The aim is that the TPRU improvements to journey time, capacity and full electrification will be delivered in stages with full completion by 2030-2032.

Second, under the plan, in the longer term Liverpool would gain a new link to

HS2, mostly using expanded and upgraded conventional lines. Provision of improved services to Warrington is also a key strategic aim.

From Lime Street, the current route towards Runcorn would be followed to Ditton, then advantage taken of the existing freight railway alignment from Ditton to Warrington Bank Quay low level, with new construction from a short distance east of Warrington to join the HS2 route southwest of Altrincham. There, trains would either go south towards Birmingham and London, or northeast to Manchester Airport and Manchester Piccadilly. Indicative journey times would be 26 minutes to Manchester Airport and 35 minutes to Piccadilly, the former a vast improvement for airport users from Liverpool. At Piccadilly, Trans-Pennine trains would reverse to head onto a new line across the Pennines towards Leeds,

re-joining the existing route at Marsden east of Standedge tunnel. Lime Street station would be expanded to accommodate extra trains, within its current footprint.

Projected timescale for delivery of these enhancements is early to mid-2040s, and an awful lot could change between now and then. The plan is a huge vote of confidence by the current Government in railways, at a time when passenger numbers across the country have been severely reduced by Covid and nobody really knows how many will return and whether growth will come back

Footnote: HS2 will not prevent a possible future western link from the Mid-Cheshire Line at Mobberley into Manchester Airport, thereby also creating a faster route to Manchester from Chester.

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## Restoring Your Railway – Beeching Reversal

The *Department for Transport* has a scheme, the *Restoring Your Railway Fund*, under which MPs, local councils and community groups across England and Wales were invited to put forward ideas to reinstate axed local services and restore closed stations. This funding stream is for new proposals and successful bidders receive £50,000 each to develop an initial business case.

Over the last two years, there have been three rounds of RYR funding. A total of 195 bids were made from across England and Wales, with 38 being awarded funding to develop an initial business case. Success at this first stage depended on both the merits of the scheme itself and the quality of the submission put together.

The initial business case is the first step on a long road to restoration, with no guarantee of progressing any further. However, three schemes from the first

round of funding in July 2020 have already secured further money from the *DfT* to develop full plans, with good prospects of eventual implementation.

In our part of North West England, there have been two successful bids outside the Wirral:

1. New station at Beeston Castle & Tarporley.

This station would be almost midway on the line between Crewe and Chester. There was a station here previously, which closed in 1966, although the new station envisaged may be on a different site. Whilst there is some new development nearby, a good part of the potential custom would be park and ride from Tarporley and the wider surrounding area.

2. Reopen the Middlewich Line to Passenger Services.

Here, the line in question is the existing route between Northwich and Sandbach through Middlewich, currently in use for freight and occasional diverted passenger trains. Proposed services at the south end would run through to and from Crewe, and at Northwich could continue along the Mid-Cheshire line through Knutsford to Altrincham, to connect with *Metrolink* trams, and maybe beyond.

Nearer to home, there was an unsuccessful bid for reopening Ledsham station, between Hooton and Capenhurst on the Birkenhead-Chester line. Although there has been quite a bit of new

development nearby in recent years, clearly this was seen as insufficient justification. Maybe, Ledsham's time will come.

Also unproductive were two bids from Lancashire County Council to reopen the Burscough curve(s), which would have enabled through trains from Southport to Ormskirk and possibly beyond to Liverpool. However, aside from Burscough, the route passes through a largely rural area, so presumably the traffic potential was considered insufficient.

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## Liverpool 'Trackless' Tram Proposal – The Paddington Line



*Computer-generated image of the Paddington Line on Brownlow Hill [from The Paddington Line Consultation document- Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0]*

Back in February 2020, just as Covid was first starting to bite, 'The Paddington Line Consultation' was launched with the idea of a trackless tram line connecting the city centre with the University of Liverpool and the new Royal Liverpool

Hospital. Previously known as the *Lime Line*, this initiative was first launched in 2017 by Liverpool city mayor Joe Anderson.

The rationale is that being uphill from the city centre has traditionally led to the University being slightly isolated and disconnected from other activity. With University developments, the new Royal Liverpool Hospital campus and the growth of the Knowledge Quarter around Paddington Village, there could be in excess of 1000 extra trips per hour along the route at peak times.

In essence, the *Paddington Line* would be a frequent public transport link, (probably using a dedicated highway alongside the Brownlow Hill carriageway), between the city centre and the Knowledge Quarter. The vehicles envisaged are battery powered trackless trams on rubber tyres guided by sensors along roads, so somewhat like a guided busway but with vehicles of tram design.

Feedback from the consultation was to be presented to the *Liverpool City Region Combined Authority* who would then have to decide whether a business plan could be drawn up. Apart from occasional mentions on websites, things seem to have gone rather quiet since then.

Guided vehicles on rubber tyres along roads have one important limitation. As the tyres would always run in the same place on the road, this would inevitably lead to the formation of ruts in a tarmac surface, so a heavy-duty road surface, eg concrete, would be necessary.

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### **Baltic Triangle Station Proposal**

As mentioned in the last issue, *Liverpool City Region* is funding design work for a new station between Liverpool Central and Brunswick on the Hunts Cross line, to serve Liverpool's Baltic Triangle area, near the former *Cains* brewery. The new station would be on the site of the previous St James station, which closed in 1917.

To avoid confusion with the existing James Street station in Liverpool city centre, it has been decided the station should have a new name linked to its location. At the time of writing, *Merseytravel* are running a public competition to choose between three names:

- Liverpool Baltic
- Liverpool Parliament Street

- Liverpool Riverside

Closing date for the competition is Friday 18<sup>th</sup> February.

Liverpool Riverside would be reviving the name of the former liner terminal station, opposite Princes Landing Stage, which was in use from 1895 to 1971 and has since been demolished. Future historians could be very confused!

The scheme will enter the next stage of design development early in 2022. On current plans the station would open in 2025, subject to funding for construction being secured.

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## **The Future of the Liverpool City Region Transport Network**

Cllr. Liam Robinson, Chair of *Merseytravel* and Liverpool City Region Transport Committee, in a talk to the *North Cheshire Rail Users Group*,

outlined *Merseytravel's* vision for the future of public transport in the Region. Some key points from the talk are summarised below.

## **Ticketing**

A new ticketing system is planned using contactless smart cards across all transport modes within Liverpool City Region. If funding permits, there would be a daily fare cap, just as for Oyster cards in London. As in London, 'talking' buses would help to give Merseyside transport 'access for all'.

## **Merseyrail for All**

The Class 777s will be the most accessible trains in the country. There are still 21 stations across the region that are not yet step free. Accessibility at these stations is being improved as Government funding becomes available - flights of stairs and stepped ramps will be replaced by step-less ramps or lifts.

## **Extra Class 777 Trains**

52 of the Class 777 trains were ordered originally, with an option available until 2028 for up to 60 more, one of which has been taken up to extend the Kirkby service to Headbolt Lane. Seven units of the current order of 53 will be equipped with traction batteries to provide independent power for the extension, but more could be fitted for other additions to the network. These units are known as *independently powered electric multiple units* (IPEMUs)

## **Network Extensions**

After Headbolt Lane, Bidston to Wrexham is the leading candidate for the next extension of the *Merseyrail* network, as it would bring benefits within Liverpool City Region as well as beyond.

Overhead or third-rail electrification of the whole route would not be viable, so the use of the battery option would be essential. With current battery technology, the 27-mile route is too far and too hilly to make a round trip without recharging at least once. If recharging at the terminus is insufficient,

a short length of 750V DC overhead line mid-route could be an option.

Other potential network extensions include:

- Ellesmere Port to Helsby and Warrington Bank Quay
- Hunts Cross to Widnes, Warrington Central and Birchwood
- Headbolt Lane to Skelmersdale and/or Wigan Wallgate
- Ormskirk to Preston

In order to be viable, extensions need to reach a major population centre such as Warrington, Wigan or Preston. Ellesmere Port just to Helsby is unlikely to provide sufficient passenger numbers.

## **New Stations and Transport Links**

Liam referred to plans for the new station at Headbolt Lane and also the design work in progress for the station between Liverpool Central and Brunswick (as described elsewhere in this newsletter). Two other proposals are Woodchurch between Upton and Heswall, and Carr Mill near St Helens. The station at Woodchurch would only be progressed if a *Merseyrail* service on the Bidston to Wrexham line were established, so as to secure sufficient payback.

Options are also being considered for improving links to *Liverpool John Lennon Airport* and the football stadiums at Anfield and Everton's new location at Bramley-Moore Dock.

## **Public Transport Management**

*Merseytravel* is seeking more control of the local rail network by pushing the Government for more devolution of powers from *Network Rail*. It is also seeking control over the City Line services out of Lime Street, including rebranding of the latter as part of *Merseyrail*.

Liverpool City Region is going through the process of securing re-regulation of

bus services, as allowed in the 2017 Bus Services Act. The aim is for a uniform

standard across trains and buses from a passenger perspective.

[DH/NPB]

## **WTUA AGM 2020/2021**

Our WTUA AGM this year was different from our previous ones in two respects: the event was held in October (13<sup>th</sup>), rather than July, and for the first time the venue was *The Merebrook* in Bromborough, next to the railway station. The first half of the meeting comprised a very informative illustrated talk given by John Allcock, Chairman of WBRUA, who spoke on *The Work and Aspirations of the Wrexham-Bidston Rail Users Association*.

This was followed by the formal business of the AGM, where two motions were passed-

- An addendum to be made to the constitution: "*The Executive Committee may extend the membership of existing paid-up*

*members into the following year(s) at no cost to the members and such members will be considered as paid up in that year(s) and therefore be able to vote at the AGM."*

- An increase to the membership subscription rates, mostly increasing the different classes by £2.

All the previous members of the Committee were re-elected and one co-opted member, Nigel Bird, elected for the first time. 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 (the link is at the end of this document). Anyone without Internet access can request a copy from one of the Committee.

<b>COMMITTEE DETAILS</b>	
Chairman & Rail Matters:	
Deputy Chairman & Chester Area Sec:	
Secretary:	<b>VACANT— volunteer required!</b>
Membership Sec:	
Friends of the Ferries:	
General Members:	
Editorial Team:	

The **WTUA's website** is at [www.wirraltua.org.uk](http://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*.

8/2/22