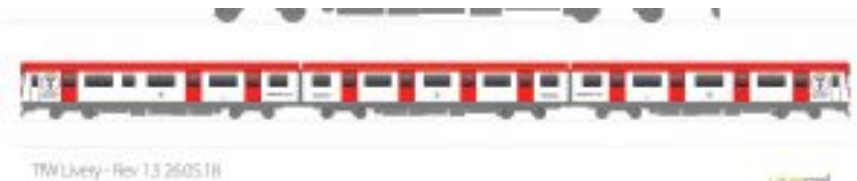


# Wirral Transport User

WIRRAL TRANSPORT USERS ASSOCIATION

## New Trains for Bidston - Wrexham Line



All Class 230 images courtesy Vivarail

Last year it was new trains for Merseyrail Electrics from Stadler in Switzerland due for delivery starting next year. This year it is new 3 car hybrid trains for the Borderlands Line from Bidston to Wrexham from VivaRail (Class 230). 5 trains have been ordered which will cover additionally Llandudno - Blaenau Ffestiniog and Crewe - Chester. A tall order

for just 5 trains when Bidston - Wrexham frequency is also eventually to be doubled to twice hourly.

See inside this Newsletter for fuller details.

The other good news is the Halton Curve is now ready and trains will operate from Liverpool to Chester from December.

### MERSEYRAIL EXTENDS GRADUALLY

MAGHULL NORTH a new station on the Northern Line Ormskirk Branch opened in the middle of June (see page 4).

On our own Wirral Line we would like to see an early reconstruction of Ledsham Station on the line to Chester. Many houses have and are being constructed in the area. A large population is and would be within walking distance. The current temporary more relaxed, more reliable timetable would allow for stops to be made. When the new Swiss Stadler trains are running, which are faster than the current 40 year old rolling stock would allow it.

We also need urgent extensions to Skelmersdale, for example, which has been highlighted on the radio as having one of the worst public transport of any town of its size in the country. We shouldn't have to wait 30 years for the system to be completed.

### WIRRAL LINE LIFTS

There are still a number of Wirral Line Stations where access is difficult and lifts are needed. In the case of Spital, for example, local residents, in conjunction with political parties, are campaigning for a lift for each platform. Interestingly in the early part of this century our organisation was promised lifts would be installed in Spital in 2006. 12 years later many still struggle up the steps or

have to travel to another station such as Bebington where there are slopes. A lift is planned for Meols station. There are other stations requiring lifts such as Wallasey Village and Port Sunlight. Many stations have received new lifts in recent years.



The picture shows a modern lift shaft at Hooton

**THE NEW TRAINS FOR THE BIDSTON - WREXHAM LINE - BORDERLANDS LINE**

As mentioned on our front page new trains have been ordered for the Bidston - Wrexham line as part of the new Welsh franchise. This is one of a number of lines controlled by the Welsh Government that run through to England.

The new trains from VivaRail are known as Class 230. They are aluminium bodied ex London Transport electric trains completely refurbished as new and newly designed interiors and traction facilities. The trains ordered are known as Diesel/Battery Hybrid Units which have electric traction powered by diesel generator and/or battery power. They are 3 car trains. The centre car will contain a toilet and gensets (Power Generators). Batteries will be fitted in the 2 outer coaches. Batteries can be recharged



through regenerative braking. There will be 4 doors per carriage which will allow for speedier loading. They will be based in a depot in Wrexham with maintenance being carried out by VivaRail.

They are Metro style trains highly suited to the line's role as part of the North Wales Metro.

The First Minister stated in the Welsh Parliament he wanted to see trains go through

the tunnels to central Liverpool. Unfortunately, passenger trains with fuel oil on board are not allowed through single line tube tunnels. Trains could not even use James Street as there is a single line tube tunnel Hamilton Square on the line back to Bidston. Battery only versions of the trains could go



through to Liverpool. Alternatively, battery powered Merseyrail Electrics units could do the job until electrification can take place. At least one is to be produced for test purposes.

The new Class 230s should produce a welcome improvement to the present service. They are to be tested initially on the Conway Valley line before use on Bidston - Wrexham. The new trains will be delivered by May 2019. The service will eventually be doubled to half hourly with three extra services being proposed as limited stop. Which station will be missed out? Why not double the service for all stations. It would be more like a Metro Service - Line 1 North Wales Metro.

**MAJOR STATION RECONSTRUCTION and REFURBISHMENT**

As part of the new Welsh Franchise 4 stations are due for major reconstruction or refurbishment. CHESTER WREXHAM GENERAL station although in England is controlled and operated by the Welsh franchisee - currently Arriva Trains Wales but from October KeolisAmey. SHOTTON station is to be-

come a major transport interchange as part of the North Wales Metro.

WREXHAM GENERAL station will have a new £10 Bus/Rail interchange and BLAENEAU FFESTINIOG Station is also part of the programme.

*The new logo for Transport for Wales is shown here. It will appear on railway rolling stock.*



## **A Bit of History on Electrification Plans for the Borderlands Line**

In 1977 when the Loop & Link was completed, plans were to carry on electrification of Merseyrail including the Borderlands Line as far as Neston. It was in fact shown on the system plan on the underground construction boards. After Loop & Link was finished bus deregulation was on the horizon. The Merseyside PTA of the time took the decision to cancel further electrification. The BR Project Manager at the time said for just £2 million pounds he could have completed the electrification then planned. We had only a good heart but few arteries. It took many years of campaigning to complete Rock Ferry - Chester for example. Some have still not been done eg to Skelmersdale although it was shown on the Northern Line Solari indicators for many years.

### **Halton Curve from Cedric Green**

The work on the infrastructure is completed on time and on budget. Driver familiarisation will be the next and final stage before the service commences with the 9<sup>th</sup> December timetable.

We understand that 2 x Class 150's will operate the service. With a journey time of approximately 45 minutes a fairly robust service can be maintained although a third unit would be desirable if available.

The hourly service will call at Liverpool South Parkway, Runcorn, Frodsham and Helsby and in reverse from Chester. Intermediate stations between Lime Street and Liverpool South Parkway are omitted to accommodate the aspiration to extend the service beyond Chester along the North Wales coast, Wrexham and ultimately to Cardiff. We do not have any tim

In the next couple of decades electrification was studied just to a new Woodchurch Interchange and a new station at Beechwood. That went no further. There were later studies for electrification just as far as Shotton. Finally under the 30 year plan we could see electrification all the way to Wrexham when it would become part of Merseyrail Electrics. The present solution for Class 230 trains is a good one as an interim measure which could last many years.

Credit is due to Wrexham Bidston Rail Users Association (WBRUA) for keeping the matter in the eye of officialdom and the public - especially over the last 2 years with their input into the new Welsh Franchise

ings, first and last train times, or weekend service details. We expect to learn the fare structure for the new service, shortly and trust it will be competitive with the Merseyrail Chester service via the Loop line. We understand David Jones of Merseytravel is working on this matter and that the fare level will be influenced by the figures used in calculating the BCR for the Halton curve re-instatement project.

We have not had any feedback from Merseytravel regarding publicising the new service. The recently formed North Cheshire Community Rail Partnership is working with CWaC and NCRUG to arrange celebrations for the service opening but this does not, at present, include media announcements or celebrity involvement.

Cedric and the North Cheshire Rail Users Association are to be congratulated on their success in campaigning for the reinstatement of this very important and useful link that was closed over 30 years ago reopening long distance travel opportunities into Wales and local communities in Frodsham & Helsby with Liverpool and Liverpool John Lennon Airport. I know Cedric has been immersed in this project for some years. - Angus Tilston

## **AIRPORT NEWS**

Liverpool John Lennon Airport now has in excess of 60 scheduled destinations. The main airlines being Easyjet, Ryanair, Blue Air, Flybe & Wizzair and due on 10th August 'Wideroe' Scandinavia's largest regional airline flying twice weekly to Bergen..

The latest new route to be announced is from Liverpool to Toulouse operating 4 times a week from 28th October. Over the 12 months to the end of March over 5 million passengers have used the airport, As part of a Strategic Vision, plans have recently been announced to develop the airport up to 2030 It envisages investing in the region of £100 million over the next 10 years. This may include extending the runway a short distance towards Hale to allow, for example, for larger aircraft for service across the Atlantic. By 2030 7.8 million passengers may be using the airport. Additional car parking and passenger facilities are planned for. This is part of a master plan that takes the thinking on to 2050.

Another project underway at the moment is 'Noise Action Plan.' A draft has been published and is available for consultation and then formal adoption and approval. Details can be found on the airport's website from where you can download copies if you wish. There is a 16 week consultation period

The busiest day this year was when Liverpool FC were playing in Ukraine. From 4.00am, for about 3 hours, more than 30 specially chartered aircraft departed with 6,000 football fans. It is an expensive business following your team these days!

The airport has been awarded a 5 star rating for punctuality by OAG with a performance 85.4% of flights on time. It has now received the 5 star rating consistently for the last 18 months and is now among the top 10% of airports on a global basis, It has also been recognised among the 30 top UK airports at the highest level for its disability access services..

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## **MAGHULL NORTH STATION**

This new station which opened on 18th June plugs a gap on the Northern Line to Ormskirk and is now the new boundary station between the Liverpool City Region and Lancashire. It is similar to Hooton on the Wirral Chester Line. It has been planned for many years but held back due to Government cuts, Finally planning permission was given in January 2017 with construction commencing in September 2017 and completed for passenger use by 18th June. There is a large car park for 156 cars and hundreds of houses are to be built on land originally earmarked for a new prison. This is the first new station under the 30 year transport plan. It shows that once work is underway construction can be quite rapid. We hope the momentum is now underway to construct other new stations mentioned in the 30 year plan.

Other stations needed on Wirral as part of the current Merseyrail Electrics system are Ledsham, where large amounts of housing will be constructed and Town Meadow where a large amount of housing already exists. At both these sites a large population is or will be within walking and cycling distance and these sites are worth saving.

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## **TRANSPORT NEWS, CHESTER & CHESTER / E'PORT to LIVERPOOL LINES - Dennis Harrison**

### **1. Chester Railway Station and depot**

Nearby at the Business Quarter development, the first office block, 1 City place, now has six tenants and the University of Law is moving here from Christleton. Demolition is taking place of one of three of Lloyds Banks buildings which marks the start of the next phase of the Business Quarter. Potentially even more passengers on rail. Events continue to be organised in the former carriage shed at the weekends.

We await the new services on the Halton Chord to Liverpool in December. Northern Connect to Leeds are now expected in Dec 2019, See below. Further additional train services are likely to require additional platforms and better track access from the east.

### **2. Timetable Changes**

The cherished North Wales Coast - Chester - Manchester Airport trains continue to run but the Northern Connect service which was hoped to start in May '18 has been put back till December '19. The latter service will run semi-fast missing out Helsby, Frodsham and Run-corn East to Manchester Victoria, Bradford and Leeds. These trains will run hourly from Chester except in the morning peak when there is an extra train to Manchester Piccadilly and

vice versa in the evening. So the peak Northern Connect train to Leeds which would have been from Chester starts from Ellesmere Port returning from Leeds and Manchester Victoria in the evening.

Merseyrail Wirral Line services to Chester are unchanged, except for the temporary timetable for further Lime St. station work allowing greater turnaround time at Chester until July 29th. We await new trains arriving 2019-2020 for 2021. They will offer increased capacity due to longer (4-car trains as against three car) and faster services due to increased acceleration so it would be good to take advantage of this by providing a new station for commuters from the existing, new and planned housing at Ledsham. A sum for a bus service has been promised and we await the results. Lack of parking at Bache and Spital is still a deterrent to increased patronage. Some speed up of services by 4-5 mins. from Chester - Shrewsbury line has just occurred without the expected increase in trains.

Virgin London services from Chester and North Wales continue to run hourly as previously and Arriva Trains Wales services are largely unchanged.

### **3. Train fares**

Most off peak fares rose between 1.4 and 2.0 % in January. Merseyrail remain very good value. Northern went up by 2.2% in January.

### **4. Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWAC) and Cheshire & Warrington LEP (Local Enterprise Partnership)**

1. Chester Northgate Development has suffered yet another setback. Already needing public money and forcing the Bus Exchange to move, the flagship store, House of Fraser, has pulled for financial reasons. A year's delay has been announced. Will it ever be built? The '200' link bus from the Bus Exchange goes to the market but could do to be every 10 mins. rather than 15 mins. and be circular via Pepper Street for the Grosvenor Precinct with other stops en route. The new bus stop/shelter on George St. is too small for the number of services stopping there and sometimes floods in the rainy season. It is useful but difficult sometimes to flag your bus to stop due to another bus obstructing the view.

2. We continue to have useful Rail User Group Community Rail Partnership Meetings with Gerard Rhodes, Planning and Strategic Transport, Cheshire West & Chester and other interested parties along with reps from other RUG's. Sometimes these meetings include Chair of Growth Track 360 and leader of CWAC, Cllr. Samantha Dixon and now Vice Chair of Transport for the North..

3. Growth Track 360 is a consortium of all the area's Local Authorities, Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership and Business Organisations wanting improvements to



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rail services in the area. If you would like to support them and find out more you can visit and sign up to their website

[www.growthtrack360.com](http://www.growthtrack360.com)

4. Concern about traffic pollution at certain locations within the city centre particularly from diesel engines.

5. There are also Transport meetings associated with Cheshire and Warrington LEP which we occasionally attend.

6. We were also invited to attend a Stakeholder meeting by consultants AECOM re Community Rail Group Consultation (Chat Moss (Liverpool-Manchester), West Coast Main Line and lines leading to Chester. North Cheshire and Wirral Transport Users were invited to attend. This was to get feedback about future aspirations for improvements to services covering these routes. We put our views about benefits of increased frequencies, Halton Curve, Shotton Interchange, Ellesmere Port-Helsby and serving Manchester Airport.

### **5. Halton Curve and Wales & Borders Franchise**

The first services to run over the Halton Curve are still on course for December 2018 and will initially be a 1 tph Liverpool Lime Street vis South Parkway to Chester using class 150 units. The infrastructure works for bidirectional working have been completed this Summer. These services will be run by the new

operator of the Wales and Borders Franchise, KeolisAmey taking over from Arriva Trains Wales on 14th October. It is expected that services from Liverpool via the Halton Chord will run to Llandudno/Shrewsbury, 1tph, Cardiff every 2 hours and Manchester Airport services will run to Bangor in 2022. Presumably Liverpool will alternate with Holyhead-Cardiff from Chester. But will there still be trains to Birmingham International from Holyhead? On weekdays at present there are not many before noon, a change that was slipped in a few years ago in favour of more morning Cardiff services. Direct services to Birmingham Airport are useful for people with luggage from Chester and Wrexham etc.

New stations in the new franchise seem to be confined to S Wales leaving Broughton (Airbus), a site which employs 6,500 people, without alternative transport. At shift change times the road past the site is a log jam of traffic (and has been for years) holding up buses as well as private cars etc. Very disappointing no commitment seems to have been made to complete the redoubling (except the A483 bridge) south of Rossett to allow a regular half hourly service or for Wrexham

N station to serve the new prison.

Meanwhile a new coach service by Easybus has been introduced from Shrewsbury, Oswestry, Wrexham and Chester De-lamere St. to Liverpool Airport. This costs £4.99 from Chester and takes only 40 minutes.

It has been reported that 5 Vi-varail class 230 diesel/battery trains are to be based at Wrexham for the Wrexham-Bidston and Conway Valley lines from May 2019. Some will appear on the Conway Valley from March. Sunday trains could run on the Conway valley and Llandudno branches all the year round after phase 2 of resignalling the North Wales Coast Line.

### **6. Hooton - Helsby and Northern Trains**

The studies being undertaken at the behest of Cheshire West and Chester Council to establish a regular passenger service over the Ellesmere Port to Helsby offer hope for an extension of Merseyrail services beyond Ellesmere Port using the new 777 Merseyrail Units on battery power some time after introduction in 2021. No reaction from Merseytravel though. The study show this to be more likely to succeed than Ellesmere Port to beyond Helsby.

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An isolated service is not good enough. A Community Rail Officer, Marina Farey, hosted by the University of Chester for the triangle of lines, Chester-Hooton-Helsby-Chester has been appointed.

Little Sutton Station, an empty listed building could become a community cafe.

Meanwhile, under their franchise agreement, Arriva Northern, is committed to an out and back service to Manchester from Ellesmere Port. This will be additional to the present largely inconvenient Parliamentary service on the route (See para. 2). The afternoon service from Ellesmere Port to Warrington now runs in the evening. There does need to be more than a token service. Employment in the Ince area is now 5000-6000 and expected to increase substantially. New housing near Ince and Elton station and the new Chester University site at Thornton needs more public transport. The GHA 36 service was replaced by the X2 service by Stagecoach from Chester to Cheshire Oaks, Thornton, Ince, Helsby, Frodsham to Runcorn Shopping City which runs hourly but takes longer than the direct bus from Chester.

### **7. Mid-Cheshire Line MCRUA**

The Manchester via Stockport, Altrincham, Knutsford and Northwich to Chester line timetable is still the same as Northern Trains do not yet have more trains. They will provide hourly services on Sundays plus on off-peak weekdays with an extra hourly semi-fast service from Greenbank to Manchester which will start as all stations from Chester. These will now come into operation in December rather than with the Summer Timetable due to late transfer of extra stock displaced by electrification schemes.

### **8. The Northern Hub**

We still await details of how they will improve capacity on The Manchester Piccadilly/Oxford

Road corridor but the Ordsall Chord is open and in use between Manchester Victoria and Deansgate.

**9. N Wales Coast Line - Resignalling/** modernisation of North Wales Coast Line is complete. A freight loop has been provided by Mostyn Docks expecting that will be traffic here. The Welsh Office now want increased line speeds. An interchange is planned at Shotton with the Wrexham-Bidston line and a report on future services is due in November by Professor Mark Barry on behalf of 'Transport for Wales'.

### **WIRRAL TRANSPORT MUSEUM or TRAM SHED**

The Wirral Transport Museum reopened on Saturday 21st July after major refurbishment. Here are the improvements as listed by MTPS Secretary Rob Jones:

New toilets, so clean the working volunteers aren't allowed to use them.

A wheelchair lift between floors,  
Graded inclines nice and smooth.

New lighting. It goes on as you approach!  
new entrance hall featuring our restored Ferry Booths.

a tea and coffee shop

a viewing gallery where you can see the trams and restoration work in the Engineering Workshop and Woodworking Area.

and lots I've forgotten to mention.

Here is a picture to give you the flavour.



## **Seaforth Deep Water Port**

The Seaforth Deep Water Port now has 3 trains per week 30 wagon, (40 containers) service to Mossend/Glasgow operated by DB Cargo. Return loads will be made up mainly of Walker's Shortbread Biscuits destined for north America. The service commenced on 08/05/2018. The work on the infrastructure is completed on time and on

## **Transport for Wales**

is to open an office in North Wales based in Wrexham. It will employ 30 people with 10 being in place by the end of the year. This is the Welsh Government not for profit company that will supervise new developments, including the North Wales Metro development and WBRUA's proposed new station at Deeside Parkway serving the industrial estate.

## **Bus Services**

The reorganisation of Wirral's Bus Services last year has left some areas where people can no longer travel easily to destinations they used go to and want to travel to. It has had the effect of virtually emptying some buses. For example, the re-routing of the 84/85 at Spital now give destinations to Bromborough & Heswall. It is not possible to travel to Bebington Civic Centre and New Ferry easily any more where people want to go.. There needs to be an examination of the effects of the changes and possibly reinstating some routes. Rerouting might have been a planners dream but the effect on real people can be life restricting for some.

**Bus Users UK** has now become a registered charity with the aim to bring people together through socially in-

## **Llangollen Railway - Corwen Central Development Project**

The building of the new Corwen Station is still carrying on steadily with a planned opening in the Spring of next year. Completion depends on having adequate resources. One of the latest items to be installed is a newly constructed vintage cylindrical water tank of 2000 gallons capacity. One major job before the new station can be used is the removal of the temporary station at Corwen East and replacing missing embankment between the two areas. Donations are always welcome to help the project's completion. When the new station opens we will organise an excursion.

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