

**REPORT TO SHEVINGTON PARISH COUNCIL POLICY AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE 1<sup>ST</sup> JUNE 2017**

**CONSULTATION ON RAIL TIMETABLE FOR SOUTHPORT LINE SERVICES –MAY 2018.**

Members will recall a presentation made by Alan Fantom Chair of OPSTA (Ormskirk, Preston and Southport Travellers Association) to the 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2016 General Purposes Committee Meeting about drastic changes being proposed to the Southport line services in 2018. Later that year Matthew Worman from Arriva Rail North talked about Community Involvement to the September 1<sup>st</sup> Policy and General Purposes Committee. During this discussion Mr. Worman promised that the Parish Council would be consulted about these timetable changes. No such consultation has been received. However through the good offices of OPSTA we have received details of the changes which are set out below. Arriva Rail (North) has suggested that OPSTA co-ordinate a response on behalf of rail users in the area and has circulated a questionnaire. (attached)

**Proposed Changes to Southport Line Services-May 2018**

Arriva Rail North (Northern) has issued detailed timetables for the services it proposes to offer from May 2018. The proposals cover ‘weekdays’ (which now means Monday to Saturday), and Sundays.

What is on offer from Northern is:

A weekday only commuter service that runs from Southport, through Wigan and Bolton on to Piccadilly. There would be two trains running inbound in the morning (at 0617 and 0717 from Southport) and two outbound trains in the late afternoon (at 1715 and 1815 from Piccadilly). The inbound services would stop at Deansgate but the outbound services would not.

A weekday hourly service that runs from Southport, via Wigan, Manchester Victoria, Rochdale and Burnley to Blackburn, and a weekday hourly service that runs from Southport, via Wigan, Manchester Victoria, Rochdale and Dewsbury to Leeds. These services would alternate. They would use existing diesel trains and both trains would call at Gathurst doubling the current frequency.

Sunday services from Southport would go to and from Blackburn via Wigan, Manchester Victoria and Burnley.

There is no proposal to maintain the direct airport service.

**Update on discussions on restoring the daytime service between Southport line stations and Manchester Piccadilly.**

While the Northern franchise plan is to divert most of our services to Manchester Victoria, the campaign to retain direct services to the south side of Manchester remains our biggest, most pressing issue and takes most of our effort.

On March 1st the Rail Minister Paul Maynard met with the 5 MPs along the route (Southport to Bolton West), Northern (train operator) and the campaign group. He stated his clear support for a solution and directed this was a matter for the Rail North and Dept for Transport Partnership to resolve by putting forward a formal proposition that demonstrates value-for-money.

Since then we strived to remain in dialogue and work with all stakeholders and on 8th May the latest working group meeting with Northern and Rail North took place. With Northern having just commenced its consultation on the major timetable changes planned for May 2018, it was a full agenda. The discussions were constructive with a number of positives coming out of it but we still have a long way to go.

Northern has developed and proposed a solution for May 2018 using its current resources which provides direct Monday-Saturday services from Wigan and Bolton to Manchester Piccadilly, but west of Wigan this will only extend to two inbound commuter trains to the south side of Manchester in the morning and two back in the early evening.

The plan is based on the bi mode Class 319 Flex train presently in development; these units will offer a very cost-effective solution that makes full use of electrified lines and yet permits direct services to destinations which have not been electrified.

It is a major step forward but, clearly, does not satisfy the requirement for a full direct service all day, every day of the week. Northern is committed to working with us on the development of a business case for the early delivery of 2 additional Class 319 Flex units that would allow them to offer more direct services to Piccadilly for the full line-of-route (ie from Southport). Northern consider this would be feasible from October '18 so there would be a hiatus.

Disappointingly this will not deliver a Sunday service which Northern stated was a consequence of how the franchise Train Service Requirement was specified. Moreover, both Northern and Rail North were less accepting that it was required. We will conduct some further passenger surveys and data analysis to prove this.

There is a strong benefit case (revenue and economic) to be made for the full 7 day service and given the Class 319 Flex trains will displace diesel units on Southport to Manchester routes, the incremental cost is limited. We have backing from the Metropolitan Borough Councils and Liverpool City Region.

In the meantime Northern has invited the campaign group to make a formal response to the timetable consultation that will reflect passengers' needs and concerns.

The campaign is a collaboration between OPSTA, Southport Rail Transport Forum (SRTF), Friends of Hindley Station and Friends of Westhoughton station; all non-political groups comprising rail users campaigning to protect (and seek improvement) of all aspects of our local rail services.

Prior to the dissolution of Parliament in May 2017 we have been engaged with all 5 MPs whose constituencies cover the rail corridor from Southport to Westhoughton, those constituencies being Southport, West Lancs, Wigan, Makerfield and Bolton West. All have shown commitment and been active in trying to get an acceptable resolution.

We have also received backing from all parish councils, one West Lancs Transport group, Railfuture, business groups (eg Liverpool & Sefton Chamber of Commerce), the Metropolitan Borough Councils and Councillors and Liverpool City Region, and most notably the passengers.

### **OPSTA questionnaire**

1. How many people are you completing this form for?
2. At which station do you USUALLY join the train?
3. At which station do you USUALLY get off the train?
4. What is the USUAL reason for your journey?
5. When do you USUALLY make this journey? (Tick all that apply)
6. At what time of day do you USUALLY start your outbound journey?
7. At what time do you USUALLY start your return journey?
8. What is your basic reaction to the new timetable?
9. In what ways do you think the new timetable will affect you? (Please select all that apply)
10. Having seen this timetable do you think we definitely need a direct train service to Bolton, Deansgate, Oxford Road and Manchester Piccadilly?

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The questionnaire is very much aimed at individual passengers. The Parish Council might like to send a general reply to the consultation. The following are points that could be included:

1. Why is the current pattern of service changed so drastically?
2. There is a need to retain a direct link with the south side of Manchester City Centre as identified in recent surveys.
3. If there is a prospect of restoring this link by December 2018 why not retain the existing timetable for a further six months?
4. The inclusion of an extra stop in the hourly pattern at Gathurst is welcomed.

5. With changes in shopping habits and leisure activity why is there no link between the Southport line and the south side of Manchester City Centre on Sundays?
6. Why have point to point journey times seem to have increased?
7. It is disappointing that there is no proposal to maintain the airport link when the general objective is to expand the number of areas with direct access to the airport.

Barry King

May 20<sup>th</sup> 2017

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