

CONFERENCE REPORT

Saturday 14th June 2008

SOLARIS CENTRE, BLACKPOOL

Conference kindly supported by Blackpool Council, Blackpool International Airport and Blackpool Transport Services Ltd

1. Welcome and Introduction

The Chairman, Peter Robinson welcomed delegates to Blackpool. He reminded delegates that the meeting now took the form of a Conference and would be reported as such rather than being specifically minuted.

He stated that the next meeting in October would include the first Annual General Meeting of TravelWatch North West since it became a Community Interest Company. At the AGM all the present Directors will retire and nominations for new Directors to serve on the Board will be invited prior to it. The Secretary will write to all members of TravelWatch NW seeking nominations in August.

He mentioned the current work in which TOWNW is involved. A series of Bus Travel Surveys on around 400 bus journeys, visits to bus stations and bus stops have recently been undertaken throughout the region. From the gathered data a report will be published that will detail the findings of the quality of service passengers currently experience.

Passenger Focus had recently been appointed by DfT to become the statutory new bus service passenger representative organisation following the Local Transport Bill, and dialogue and liaison was being opened with PF to determine the roles that the TravelWatch movement could play in the new regime. A meeting of TW Chairmen and the Chair and Chief Executive of PF was scheduled for mid June.

Attention was drawn to the recently published report on Migration from Rail which compared journey details of parallel routes of rail and bus services and in particular the migration from rail to bus as a result of the new Seniors free bus travel concession.

2. Public Transport in Blackpool - Blackpool Council Overview - David Simper, Transport Policy Officer

David began by describing the transport demand in Blackpool and in particular the pressure brought by 10 million visitors per year to the resort. Tourism provides 32% of employment in a population of 142,000; 64,000 households, (37.4% of which do not have a car). The town has a number of social problems, being identified as the 12th highest deprived community in England with 20,000 economically inactive adults, and the 2nd lowest male life expectancy in England. The resort was seeking to regenerate to diversify the economy as well as accommodating modern tourism. Its excellent road, coach and rail links were an asset.

A number of goals had been identified to improve economic prosperity, improve skills and educational attainment, correct the poor health statistics, and create a safe, clean and pleasant town. In transport terms a series of objectives had been identified to improve traffic management and air quality and thus reduce environmental impacts, give better accessibility by supporting sustainable local communities, influence travel patterns and behaviour and manage and develop transport resources to achieve economic growth by optimising use of present transport assets. Assets were identified as:

- Ø Compact town with good spread of facilities
- Ø High frequency buses with a good network
- Ø High capacity road network
- Ø Lots of parking
- Ø Town centre well connected with heavy rail and coach facilities
- Ø Tramway available for improvement
- Ø Reasonably flat for cycling
- Ø Identifiable communities around District Centres enabling walking

A number of major improvement projects were planned for the town to address the identified needs. These include the Talbot Gateway (in the vicinity of Blackpool North station), a new Town Centre strategy for the Talbot Square area, a Promenade movement strategy in the Tower area to realign traffic movements in favour of pedestrians, the ongoing Tramway improvement, relocation of Blackpool & Fylde College, the Central Corridor to reduce environmental impacts and provide better traffic amenities, and the ongoing development of the former Central Station site (the area identified for the Super Casino).

LTP led programmes included major road junction upgrades to favour pedestrians and cyclists, quality bus corridors, strategic cycling network including becoming an identified "Cycling Town", traffic calming, identified district centres, Smartcard technology for Seniors bus travel, adoption of travel planning and promotion policies, heavy rail improvement on the south Fylde line and through services to Manchester Victoria to optimise connections from east Manchester.

Challenges for the future included the Local Area Agreement to drive monitoring of performance (but not currently featuring any transport indicators), area action plans to build new communities, a Regeneration Transport Strategy to manage the visitor experience, development of Pleasure Beach access, Climate Change agenda, rising cost of fuel, economic change and redefining the new Blackpool (which must be market led to attract a new generation of visitors).

Blackpool Transport Services Ltd - Steve Burd, Managing Director

Blackpool Transport is one of 14 remaining local authority owned transport operators. It currently employs 784 staff, has 181 buses and 48 operational trams. Whilst it is local authority owned it is required to operate on a commercial business basis.

Blackpool Transport Services has invested £7.6 million in new vehicles in the last seven years and these include low-floor Double Deck Tridents and low-floor Solo minibuses. This has resulted in an increase in the number of routes offering low-floor guaranteed and wheelchair accessible vehicles.

The bus network development over recent years had led to introduction of Metro Coastlines Network, simplified high frequency timetables, individual "Line" route branding, line branded timetable and route publicity, replaced "low frequency all roads served" network. Today virtually every section of route in Blackpool enjoys a higher frequency service than it did pre de-regulation.

Fares have been kept as low as possible and a maximum single fare of £2 has been held for four years. Other incentives have been introduced including the Metro Saver one day bus ticket covering the company's entire operating area, a one day family version of the Bus and Tram Travelcard, monthly Zonecards for regular travellers and an expanded range of agents via the PayPoint network. Also an experimental scheme is being introduced at two schools in Blackpool to provide children under 16 with a day's unlimited travel for only £1 on Saturdays, Sundays, Bank Holidays and the main school holidays and extend the validity of half fare concession to end of the academic year in which a child's 16th birthday falls rather than to a child's birthday. It is hoped to extend the scheme borough wide next year.

In September 2006 Blackpool Transport became the first bus operator in the country to operate fully ITSO compliant concessionary passes live in service. In June 2008 Blackpool Transport became the first operator to be able to automatically recognise, validate and charge against ENCTS Smartcards from all 174 English Travel Authorities on its buses. The target is to extend this facility to trams in the next few months. It is also hoped to make greater use of the NowCard SmartCard e.g. stored travel rights.

Marketing has been improved by the distribution of the Metro Guide twice a year to over 121,000 houses and businesses in the Fylde Coast in May and November and having all buses individually route branded with different liveries enabling easy identification.

The company has embarked on an intensive set of training courses for operational staff including defensive driving, performance assessments, refresher courses, and customer care.

Passenger numbers have grown by 18% since 2001 and a number of awards for excellence have been received during that time. Turnover since 2001 has increased by 42% to £23 million. In 2007/8 a profit of £1.6 million was achieved.

The tramway is currently undergoing a major upgrade to improve infrastructure, track replacement, low floor platforms, upgraded engineering and new trams at an estimated cost of £85.3 million, funded by DfT, Lancashire CC and Blackpool BC. Main works will commence winter 2009/2010 and continue during each winter until 2012 with a target completion and launch at Easter 2012.

In 2010 Blackpool Tramway will celebrate its 125th anniversary and will mark it with a major event in September of that year that will feature a number of visiting heritage vehicles including six National Tramway Museum trams from Crich, one tram from the East Anglian Transport Museum and two further trams from Beamish and the Birkenhead Tramway Museum.

Current challenges to Blackpool Transport are the cost of diesel which has increased by £1 million since 2007, and the increase in ridership by Seniors using free concession cards which, so far in 2008, has seen an increase of 346% on Line 1 alone.

Questions and Discussion

- Q. If Blackpool can operate services into the late evening, why can't other areas?
- A. Local Authority ownership brings some advantages, one being a cross subsidy facility from profitable lines to support the less profitable and from daytime profitable services to the less profitable at night. Equally the availability of night time services encourages greater use of daytime services.
- Q. Are there any plans to use the Apollo 2000 site? Are there any proposals to extend the number of bus services going into South Station? Are there any plans to introduce trolley buses?

- A. No plans to use Apollo site at present pending other development proposals. No plans to extend further services into South station. No intention to introduce trolley buses.
- Q. Difficulty in finding and understanding information using website for visitors.
- A. Looking to upgrade website and will consider comments. Information by telephone line is available but information at North station may need improving. Other services and utilities (e.g. hospitals) may also need to improve travel and access information.
- Q. Is there any difference between summer and winter frequencies given the changes of tourist seasons?
- A. Majority of routes run all year round. Seniors free travel is having a major effect but there are large differences in revenue between winter and summer from tram ridership. 96% of the company profit comes from buses.

3. Lancashire & Cumbria Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS) - Chris Dale

Chris described the area covered by the RUS proposals and emphasised that it did not include the West Coast main line. It was divided into 6 route sections with a series of potential improvements for each:

Cumbrian Coast - Barrow to Sellafield - peak train lengthening; Whitehaven to Sellafield - peak train lengthening; Barrow to Carlisle - use extra stock to improve service; Barrow to Lancaster - hourly service; Infrastructure improvements; Carlisle to Whitehaven - additional Sunday service.

Settle and Carlisle - Carlisle to Leeds - hourly service as the long term aspiration, but two hourly at first, Increase line speeds; Carlisle South Junction to London Road Junction - double track.

Roses Line - Manchester Victoria to Blackburn - extend peak trains to and from Clitheroe; Blackburn to Clitheroe - line speed improvements; east of Burnley Manchester Road - line speed improvements.

Ormskirk to Preston - line speed improvements to provide hourly service; Burscough Chord South - reinstate and operate hourly service from Southport to Ormskirk with interchange to and from Preston at Burscough junction.

Branch Lines - Oxenholme to Windermere - recast timetable to provide better connection facilities at Oxenholme; Morecambe to Leeds - cut back service to operate only between Skipton and Lancaster or Morecambe to allow increase in services. Retime trains to provide better connections at Lancaster, Carnforth and Skipton.

Miscellaneous - Preston station - relocate prefabricated buildings on platforms 1 and 2; Carlisle station - improve access between platforms using escalators or lifts; Ormskirk station - improve interchange facilities; Blackburn station - provide full length canopy on platform 4; Burscough Junction station - provide interchange facilities if Burscough Chord South reinstated.

Consultation responses that need to be accompanied with reasoned arguments should be sent to Network Rail by 18th July next.

Observations from delegates:

- Ø Calder Valley/Todmorden services will be in the Yorkshire and Humberside RUS.
- Ø Lancaster - Skipton survey carried out by RUG had shown that 80% of passengers travelled end to end on the line.

- Ø More investment required in new rolling stock as passenger numbers continue to increase.
- Ø Southport - Preston service would make better business case than to Ormskirk.
- Ø Fleetwood - no proposals to reinstate rail services.
- Ø Hellifield - Clitheroe - only mentioned for track upgrade. No intention for further passenger services.

4. Schools Transport - Paul Fawcett

Paul explained that the Education and Inspection Act 2006 had contained a number of proposals affecting schools transport amongst the other items.

Local Education Authorities awarded (by bidding process) Pathfinder status are able to pilot changes to the existing (Ed Act 1996) pupils' entitlement to free travel to their nearest suitable and available school. This is currently over 3 miles walking distance (2 miles if pupil under 8). In 1996 the existing free travel criteria dis-applied e.g. could be replaced by a flat fare irrespective of distance or by Yellow Buses provisions. BUT Pathfinder LEAs must provide a means tested free travel entitlement for protected pupils in appropriate conditions. Definitions of protected pupils are - free school meals or parent(s) receiving family tax credits. Appropriate conditions - that there are not three or more nearer suitable qualifying schools. Free travel - 2-6 miles, or, if attending faith schools, 2-15 miles.

School bus services will no longer need to be registered under PPV Act 1981. "Scholar" travel (16-19) is now the responsibility of the Learning and Skills Council. It is the LEA's and Schools' duty to prepare sustainable travel plans.

TravelWatch NW was invited to comment on the proposals and offered the following:

- Ø Parental choice can be incompatible with sustainable travel - could promote longer journeys to school.
- Ø May be negative modal shift by pupils previously entitled to free travel.
- Ø Flat fares may be more equitable.
- Ø Free travel over two miles could promote obesity, capacity constraints and higher LEA costs.
- Ø Not just a bus problem - some significant pupil flows on rail in the NW.
- Ø School bus services are often jointly procured and integrated with registered local services - allowing unregistered operation could be unhelpful, and would make timetable information harder to access.
- Ø Cross boundary journeys between Pathfinder and non Pathfinder LEAs will be complex.
- Ø LEAs, LTAs, Health and Social Service Departments often in breach of their statutory duty to co-operate (TA 85 s88).
- Ø LT Bill provisions re Permit Minibuses and use of PHVs as taxi buses may be helpful.
- Ø Overall, Part 6 of the Education and Inspection Act 2006 is still the "elephant in the room". Ignore at our peril.
- Ø Today's pupils = tomorrow's full fare passengers.

Stop press 1st June 2008 - Dept for Communities Families and Schools (DCFS) has rejected all 23 LEAs' Pathfinder bids and will now work with LGA to look at ways of progressing!

5. Open Forum

Seniors Railcards - Availability of Saver Tickets for Senior railcard holders before 9.30 am had been withdrawn by Arriva on its Cross Country services. It was clarified that this was a facility offered only by Virgin which had changed following its loss of the XC franchise.

Virgin had confirmed that it still intended to retain the concession on its West Coast services but could only do so for routes where it set the fare. It was also suggested that some the availability of some advance fares on other operators had increased in response to the changes.

Overcrowding - Some services into Blackpool were seriously overcrowded at weekends due to short train formations. It was suggested that they could be lengthened as more stock may be available from normal Mon - Friday services. In practice this could often not be achieved because of operational and weekend train maintenance issues. In addition Saturday timetables were now almost as intensive as those for weekdays, requiring similar rolling stock requirements. New additional train sets were promised by 2014.

Sellafield Commuters - Some passengers were migrating from trains due to overcrowding. Operational issues, train diagrams and stock availability were the problem but Northern trains are looking into strengthening trains, however costs may be preventive.

Rail Fares Manual - This had ceased publication.

Hindley - Direct Manchester Airport services planned in the next timetable.

NOW Card Website - It was stated that the information contained on this was now out of date.

Travel Websites - it was suggested that many are confusing and difficult to navigate and occasionally out of date. TWNW will consider undertaking some desk research into this issue. .

6. Next Conference

The next TravelWatch Conference will take place in Manchester on Thursday 2nd October 2008 and will feature presentations from Chris Green, (formerly MD of Virgin Trains), Passenger Focus and Dave Wetzel on Land Value Capture. The event will also feature the Annual General Meeting in the afternoon.

7. Visits

After lunch a number of delegates took a tram trip and visit to the Blackpool Transport depot.

8. Attendance

See attached.

Attendance List 14th June 2008

Name	Organisation
Alan Dawson-Brown	Mobility Panel
Alan Pettener	East Cheshire Line RUG
Andrea Fawcett	
Andrew Macfarlane	Greater Manchester Transport Campaign
Andy Murray	Northern Rail
Barry Drelincourt	Rossendale Bus
Bill Harrop	Transport Pool
Brian Grey	Railfuture NW
Charles Agate	
Charles Oakes	National Taxi Association
Chris Dale	TWNW
Christine Dawson-Brown	Blackpool Equalities Forum
Colin Barnett	Bus Users UK
Dave Koring	Crewe & Shrewsbury Passrs Association
David Butterworth	TWNW
David Evans	Blackpool & Fylde RUA
David Hall	Halton Borough Council
David Simper	Blackpool BC
Fred Consterdine	Crewe & Shrewsbury Passrs Association
Geoff Kerr	TWNW
Graham Price	TWNW
Janet Cuff	Ramblers Assoc
Jenni McGivern	Cheshire CC
John Aaron	TWNW
John Hart	TWNW
John Moorhouse	TWNW
John Murray	Rochdale Transport Partnership
John Owen	TWNW
John Warner	TWNW
Keith Pennyfather	Macclesfield PublicTransport Liaison Cttee
Leonard Green	Confederation of Passenger Transport
Lillian Burns	NW Transport Activists Roundtable
Louise Ebbs	First TransPennine Express
Malcolm Richardson	Blackpool & Fylde RUA
Malcolm Conway	Lakes Line RUG
Martyn Davies	Merseytravel
Mick Elliot	First TransPennine Express
Mike Lambden	National Express

Mike Wrigley	STORM
Paul Brent	National Taxi Association
Paul Fawcett	TWNW
Paul Spenley	Wigan RUG
Peter Garvey	Greater Manchester Transport Campaign
Peter Lamkin	Wrexham Birkenhead RUA
Peter Robinson	TWNW
Preva Crossley	Friends of Hindley Stn
Richard Clarke	
Richard Rollins	Lancaster and Skipton RUG
Robert Talbot	Lakes Line RUG
Steve Burd	Blackpool Transport Services Ltd
Steve McCulley	
Tim Fowles	Trueform Engineering
Tom Lunt	TWNW
Tony Fawthrop	Greater Manchester Transport Campaign
Tony Potts	Copeland RUG