

RESPONSE TO NORTH WEST ROUTE UTILISATION STRATEGY JANUARY 07

General Comments

TravelWatch NorthWest (TWNW) is an independent body representing users of all public transport services in NW England.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the draft RUS.

In general TWNW welcomes the content and analysis of the issues facing North West rail services that the consultation draft covers. It is encouraging to see options for enhancement to relieve what is already an overloaded network in places and to take account of growth.

We have some concern about the passenger growth scenarios used. Others will no doubt raise similar concerns. One particular aspect that we would emphasise is the hypothesis that on many popular routes there is significant latent or suppressed passenger demand **now**. This is evidenced by full car parks at many stations by 08.00; passengers left behind at some stations due to full trains; overcrowding as referred to in the draft. It is unfortunate that the RUS has not examined car parking provision and car park extensions, though it is acknowledged that this would be a major study.

Specific comments

Paragraph 3.3.6 – Overcrowding. It is acknowledged that the morning peak is more concentrated but service frequency in the evening peak can be less, thus some individual trains can load heavily (e.g. Calder Valley)

Paragraph 3.3.7 – Passengers' ultimate destinations. We welcome this exercise and the growing importance of Manchester Victoria is referred to later.

Paragraph 3.5.8 - Car parking. The fact that the RUS area has only 25% the car parking capacity as in the West Midlands is a stark figure and adds to the arguments about latent and suppressed demand.

Supported by:

NorthWest Development Agency; North West Regional Assembly; Manchester Airport pb; Greater Manchester PTE; Merseytravel; Stagecoach North West; TransPennine Express; Virgin Trains; Passenger Focus

Paragraph 3.5.9 - Integration with other public transport modes. Integration with Metrolink would benefit from improved through ticketing arrangements (see also paragraph 6.3.11 below)

Section 3.7 – Current network performance – The issue of short turnrounds at terminal stations includes many examples e.g Manchester Victoria which also has capacity constraints.

Paragraph 3.8.5 - Calder Valley trains often terminate in non bay platforms (less convenient for passengers).

Section 3.9. – Current engineering access. The “Efficient Engineering Access” study should not omit to approach the issue from the passengers view - i.e to seek minimal disruption wherever possible (especially on Sundays which is an increasingly popular day for travel) and to keep bus replacement to a minimum. TravelWatch NW has produced a report on this – “Disrupted Rail Journeys”, which is available on our website.

Paragraph 3.10.8 – Facilities at some stations, including parking, discourage off-peak travel. Increasingly peak travellers are becoming more affected by lack of car parking as well as constrained by on – train crowding. This emphasises the need for a comprehensive car parking study.

Section 5.1 - Manchester stations. We agree that Victoria is becoming increasingly important in city centre locational terms and that it is not well served. However our current perception is that the capacity of the station would be a constraint on permitting further service expansion at peak times.

Paragraph 5.2.4 - Growth forecasts. We cannot overemphasise the potential for very high levels of growth taking into account current suppressed demand and the likelihood of future constraints on road usage brought about by congestion and road demand management measures.

Paragraph 6.2.3 – Addressing peak crowding. We do not consider that the “Do nothing” & “Increase price” options should be pursued – they are not in the best interests of rail passengers.

Paragraph 6.2.5 - Stations. As intimated earlier, car parking is a vital factor in suppressed demand. Proper consideration of this issue should be an important element of rail accessibility and demand. Any comprehensive study should be linked with multi modal integration and the potential for other modes to access stations.

Corridors

6.3.1 Stockport corridor – Option 8: Closures. Reddish South and Denton are effectively already closed having a once weekly unidirectional token service. It is difficult to comment on what anticipated demand might be as the service was run down several years ago. Development plans for the area should be taken into account when further considering this option.

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6.3.2 Marple corridor – Option1: Marple line services to Victoria. This is an interesting proposal and the attractiveness of Victoria station’s location is acknowledged. Further work is needed on the principle of splitting through services between each of the 2 principal Manchester stations (and reducing frequencies to each) in terms of attractiveness to passengers/ potential passengers (including journey times and service choice). Station/ capacity improvements would be required at Victoria. How would the Fish Dock development fit with the existing Metrolink platforms?

Option 5: Close Ardwick station. We would not disagree with this.

6.3.4 Stalybridge corridor. We fully support the need to address peak crowding on this busy corridor.

6.3.6 Calder Valley corridor. We support the extension of Manchester – Rochdale local trains to Todmorden.

6.3.7 Bolton corridor. Option 2: Blackburn additional train off-peak. Increased frequencies between Bolton and Blackburn should be looked at in conjunction with the potential for through services between East Lancashire and Manchester. Redoubling of the track between Bolton and Blackburn would bring with it many wide ranging benefits and strongly address latent demand.

6.3.9 Chat Moss corridor. Option 2 – concern at effect on Warrington Central through service opportunities.

Option 7. We support the Eccles interchange concept

6.3.10 CLC corridor. Option 3 Liverpool South Parkway. Better services are required in the non Liverpool direction from LSP.

6.3.11 Northwich corridor. Better integration with Metrolink is needed in terms of connections and through ticketing. But there is also a need to retain through Manchester services because of physical problems with interchange, increased journey times and overcrowding on Metrolink.

Section 6.4 Emerging conclusions

6.4.1 Measures to alleviate peak crowding. We believe that there is a clear need for additional rolling stock -

- To relieve current overcrowding on peak services
- To allow latent demand to be met
- To allow for future growth and provide an acceptable option to the private car.

There is an urgent need to address ways of making the case for financing extra rolling stock as current franchise agreements do not permit expansion which does not cover direct costs. A formula is required which takes other benefits into account in a broader way than conventional Benefit/Cost Ratio appraisal. Environmental and Climate Change issues must now receive greater emphasis.

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6.4.2 Infrastructure changes

Car parking improvements are vital coupled with other infrastructure enhancements and of course train strengthening

We feel that doubling Bolton – Blackburn should not be ruled out but a wider view taken of benefits that it would bring.

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