

North West

By Trevor Bishop

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■ ■ Northern responds to campaigners' appeal

The Blackpool and Fylde Rail Users' Association welcomed the new timetable launched in mid December 2008. Three improvements have been secured.

1) The South Fylde line witnessed all trains running through to Blackpool South whereas previously two early morning trains had terminated at Lytham St Annes.

2) The stopping pattern at Kirkham & Wesham has been improved. Before the new timetable, this station had two trains per hour stopping there. However, they arrived within ten minutes of each other and then there was nothing for the next 50. Kirkham now sees three trains per hour with a more sensible stopping pattern.

3) Northern has introduced a new hourly Blackpool North to Manchester Victoria service, which replaces the Buxton trains. Some of the services use the newly acquired class 180 Adelante units.

It is refreshing to note that the users' association asked Northern to review all these aspects.

■ ■ Better Saturday services for STORM

Rail user group STORM (Support The Oldham Rochdale Manchester lines) has been pressing for a better Saturday evening Manchester-Rochdale service for a long time and that pressure has paid off. The Northern timetable, which started in December 2008, has two additional Saturdays-only Victoria-Rochdale via Castleton short workings at 22.21 and 23.20. The last down Calder Valley on Saturdays is now 22.54 instead of 22.47 and runs first-stop Rochdale.

■ ■ Middlewich could be put back on the railway map

The Middlewich Railway Steering Group, a partnership of several local authorities, rail interest groups and other public organisations, has appointed the Railway Consultancy to carry out a study to assess the potential for upgrading the Sandbach-Northwich branch line for passenger services. This would include the provision of a new station to serve the Cheshire market town of Middlewich which lost its rail service in 1960. The study was expected to report its findings before the end of March.

Middlewich (population 13,000) is now the largest town in Cheshire without a railway station. More than 50% of the working population of the town commute out of Middlewich by car and the majority of these work in Greater Manchester.

Middlewich station, along with the nine-mile line from Sandbach to Northwich, closed to passengers in 1960. The site of the old railway station now has new houses close by, so a site has already been identified and reserved for a new station. Although currently restricted to 20mph working, the line is still in use for diversions, driver training, charter services and occasional freight. The ultimate intention is to provide a regular passenger service between Crewe and Manchester via Sandbach, Middlewich, Northwich, Knutsford and Altrincham.

The reopening of this line to passenger traffic and construction of a new station has been a long-standing ambition of Middlewich residents, Middlewich Town Council, the Middlewich Rail Link Campaign and the Mid Cheshire Rail Users' Association.

John Oates, chairman of the Mid Cheshire Rail Users' Association, said: "We know from working with people locally that there is significant demand to connect Middlewich with a station – that would be in the middle of the town – into the Cheshire railway network.

"As well as opportunities to connect Middlewich people to the outside world without using their cars or the slow local bus services, it would also provide many from mid Cheshire with the chance to travel by train direct to Middlewich and importantly also to Crewe to connect into long-distance rail services, thus reducing the significant number that currently drive there."

More info: www.middlewichstation.org.uk/ and www.mcrua.org.uk/projects/



Picture: Sill Lighting

A beacon for Metrolink

This is how one of the new stations for Manchester's Metrolink system will look when it is opened in two years time.

The new station will serve The Gateway development which is midway between Monsall and Dean Lane.

Trains on the Manchester-Rochdale line will stop running in October to allow for conversion of the 14-mile long Oldham loop.

Trams between Manchester and Central Park should start in spring 2011, and go as far as Rochdale a year later.

There will be a 12-minute interval service from Rochdale station and another 12-minute interval service from Shaw and Crompton.

This will give, during the day-time, a tram every six minutes to

and from Shaw and Crompton to Manchester and Chorlton.

The dramatic look of the new Gateway station will be provided by 21 projectors and lamps from Sill Lighting which produced this computer image of what it should look like, thanks to lighting designers Light Bureau.

Architects Aukett Fitzroy Robinson designed the gateway as an "iconic marker of the transport interchange". The roof shape is the focal point of entry into this regeneration area on a brownfield site.

Architect David Exeter said: "Lighting was key to the project because for a lot of the time the station is used in darkness.

The blades of the roof structure also reflect light so creating a beacon in the landscape."

Why we need electrification

By Ian McDonald

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At a time when the Government wants to build more motorways and airport capacity to help overcome the current economic downturn, Railfuture advocates a re-started electrification programme, which would more effectively reduce carbon emissions in transport, help meet the significant increase in rail passengers, and provide efficient capacity for carrying more freight on the railways.

And to coincide with the renewed interest in electrification, Railfuture's Network Development Committee has produced its long-awaited paper on Railway Electrification.

The Government spin that it is building more trains fails to address particularly the problem of the "intercity express programme" train, now widely regarded in the

railway industry as a white elephant, expected to last 35-40 years, when oil supplies will have diminished and will certainly cost much more.

Network Rail and ATOC have produced similar papers on electrification.

Readers can read or download the six-page paper at www.railfuture.org.uk, go to "campaigns", and then "Electrification".

We have sent the paper to the Department for Transport, and all other relevant organisations.

We hope members will find it a useful campaigning tool. We will update it later to include more routes, if the initial response is favourable.

Members with no access to a computer can be sent print copies.

Please send an A5 SAE to Ian McDonald, 10 Douglas Road, Maidstone, Kent ME16 8ES.