

Friends of Walkden Station



GREATER MANCHESTER TRANSPORT STRATEGY 2040

Friends of Walkden Station
Consultation Response
September 2016



**The Queen's Award
for Voluntary Service**

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Friends of WALKDEN Station

Foreword

Friends of Walkden Station are a group of dedicated volunteers seeking to raise the status and profile of the station in the community. A key element of our long term strategy is to lobby for infrastructure and service improvements, and our aims are in many respects closely aligned with those of TfGM. In summer 2015 we submitted a consultation response to the ***Greater Manchester 2040 Transport Strategy: Our Vision*** document, setting out our vision for the development of public transport in our area in the longer term, particularly rail, and where Walkden fits in to this strategy. We are now pleased to submit our response to the 2040 Strategy consultation draft document which further develops our ideas and applies them to the potential long term development of Walkden as a key multi-modal transport hub for the western area of the conurbation.

Overview

We live in a fast changing world, and the development of our transport networks needs to reflect this. The key is connectivity, into, through and around the regional centre, with seamless transfer between modes. Walkden is experiencing rapid residential and commercial development, and needs fast and efficient links to serve its ever increasing population. It is also important to spread the benefits of economic development throughout our City region, and improved connectivity will help achieve this.

Public transport is the key to sustainable development of our transport network. Improved access to the network by walking and cycling, as well as provision for car parking at stations, connectivity between modes, and accessibility for users with reduced mobility will lead to sustainable growth in travel for work and leisure. This holistic, multi-modal approach can be applied to Walkden as a potential transport hub. If implemented correctly, the resulting modal shift will bring considerable benefits for residents, improving their access to work, leisure and retail facilities, health and education and the Airport, with reduced pollution and improvements to health and quality of life.

Near Term Interventions

Our current transport network falls well short of the standard required to reflect the modern, 24-hour, vibrant city region we aspire to be a part of. Walkden is blighted by severe road traffic congestion caused by capacity pinch points on the strategic road network that were not designed to handle anything like the volumes of traffic now using them. The current alternatives are limited in their effectiveness. Bus services are caught up in the same traffic congestion, encouraging people to remain in their cars. Our rail services are full to capacity in the peaks and suffer from poor connectivity especially for journeys through and beyond central Manchester. Services are infrequent in the evenings and do not run all day on Sundays. The station has no car parking facilities and is not accessible to disabled people or those unable to climb the 50 steps to the platform.

It is noted that the 2040 Strategy underlines the need to improve safety and security on our public transport network. Currently pedestrian access to Walkden station is poor with priority given to traffic, and work is required to improve this and provide safer access for

pedestrians and cyclists. Walkden can be included in the “Cycle and Ride” project using a part of a future car park area for the safe storage of bicycles.

Friends of Walkden Station have engaged with the rail industry, with TfGM and our local council to find solutions to some of our most pressing issues as soon as possible, and we are optimistic that car parking provision and disabled access will be resolved in the fairly near future. We are also encouraged by some significant improvements in rail service frequency due to implemented in December 2017 which will provide services that better reflect demand. This will provide a better base from which to develop a long term strategy to make Walkden a key transport hub, providing significant benefits for the local economy and its residents.

Medium Term Interventions

We want to see significant increases in usage of our rail service, and a consistent level of improvement to service quality. This needs to be achieved sustainably, and the optimum solution for Walkden is the electrification of the railway and replacement of diesel powered trains with new generation electric units. The “Northern Sparks” report confirmed that the Walkden line is a priority for electrification and, with its increasingly intensive service and expected significant growth in passenger numbers, this needs to be delivered as soon as reasonably practicable. We strongly support electrification of our line as soon as possible to enable future electric services to destinations not only in the regional centre but also to open up faster, sustainable journey opportunities to destinations within and beyond the region. This will become increasingly important, as towns within Greater Manchester and across its boundaries will need to play their role in economic development of the North.

In addition, stations can act as inbound transport hubs for future developments, for example to access the Logistics North complex and its employment opportunities, which falls within Walkden’s catchment area. The RHS have chosen to locate their fifth garden, RHS Bridgewater, in Worsley partly due to its “good public transport links”¹, is expected to attract 1 million visitors per annum and provides a golden opportunity for Walkden station to be a showcase gateway station underlining rail travel’s sustainability. With these developments in mind, connectivity once again is key, and the further development of services to encompass a variety of direct destinations along with seamless connections will maximise the opportunity to attract more use of rail.

Light rail also has an important role to play in opening up new journey opportunities. We do not consider the replacement of existing services on the Walkden line with tram-train or other light rail options to be desirable; however we do see a role for light rail as complimentary to heavy rail in our area and as an enabler of new services. We will further explore this in our long term proposals.

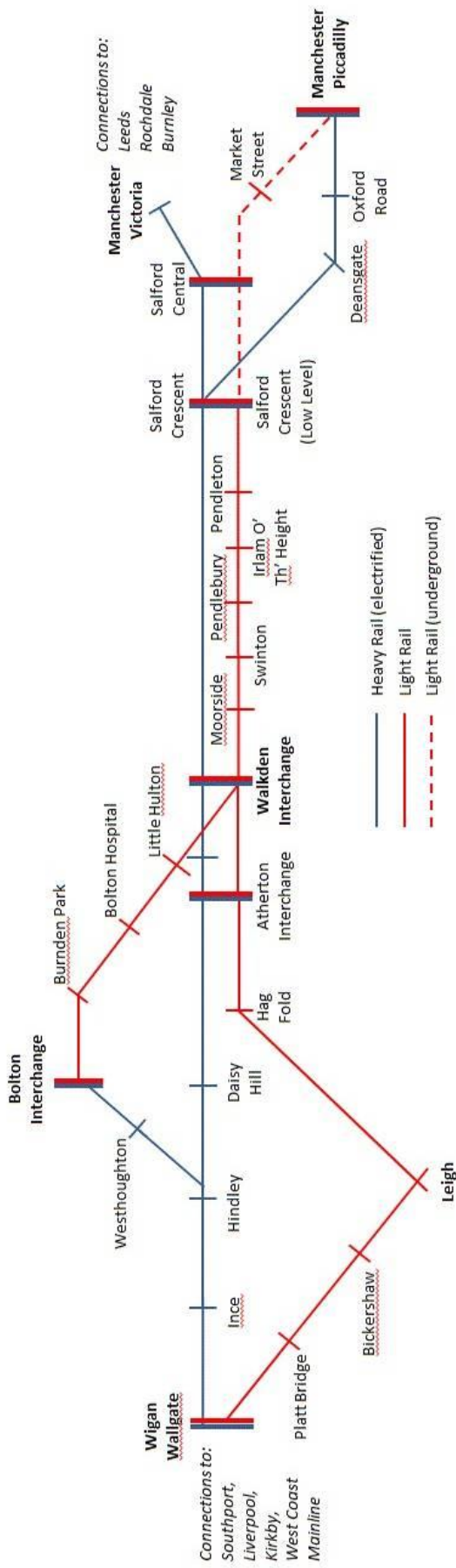
¹ RHS Director General, Sue Biggs, said: 'We always thought it would take us a long time to find the ideal site for our Fifth Garden, but with its beautiful landscapes, good public transport links and outstanding location, Worsley New Hall was an opportunity we couldn't miss.' Ref: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/blogs/RHS-Gardens/new-rhs-garden-announced>

2040 – How will it look?

Emerging and developing technologies will shape the way we travel in the future. It is essential that technological advances in public transport are complimentary to other travel modes rather than competitive with them. For example, autonomous cars or shared pods could offer a safe and convenient on-demand transfer between homes and stations, with provision made for them at stations. This would also reduce the rate of increase of demand for parking in the longer term while ensuring that longer journeys are made predominantly by rail rather than entirely by car. Smart ticketing products could include the use of these vehicles for short transfers to public transport nodes which then discourages the use of privately owned vehicles. Walkden is an obvious candidate for this type of system with its high numbers of residential developments spreading out from the station's location in all directions. This also relieves pressure on the local Key Route Network. Wherever possible, shorter journeys to and from the station will be made on foot using pedestrian routes that are safe and attractive to use, especially after dark when people may currently be dissuaded from walking.

It is also important to look beyond Greater Manchester and consider the potential of busy locations such as Walkden to act as hubs for longer journeys, either by direct connections to other key locations in the North such as Leeds, or to maximise connectivity with longer distance destinations such as London by providing seamless transfer opportunities. This can then reduce the pressure on the regional centre and its main stations by passengers making more through journeys. Connectivity to HS2 and Manchester Airport are hugely important considering that current links to Piccadilly and the Airport are very poor.

In order to meet the demands of the future and deliver a fully multi-modal public transport solution to serve our part of the City Region, we have developed the **Walkden Hub** concept shown in schematic form on the following page.



Schematic Diagram of FOWS Proposal for the Walkden Hub

Longer Term Interventions – the Walkden Hub

Our vision is to maximise Walkden’s potential as an interchange between different transport modes, with the aim of providing capacity for economic development of the area and the resulting increase in demand for access to employment, education, health care and the leisure economy. This would not only facilitate better links with the Regional Centre but also stimulate economic growth in the local area, including the regeneration of more deprived parts of the catchment area. The plan is ambitious but fully deliverable, and therefore reflects TfGM’s ambitions in the wider 2040 Strategy. Key to the concept is the evolution and improvement of current facilities along with the provision of new links, mainly re-using disused railway formations for the extension of the light rail network.

It is assumed that in the intervening period Walkden Station will have accessibility improvements completed including disabled access, car parking and more frequent rail services with increased capacity. As a result, passenger numbers will have increased significantly, and there will have been further residential and retail development resulting in the expansion of the station's catchment area and revenue potential. The RHS garden development will be open with a link to the station.

Hub components are as follows:-

Active Travel

A network of safe walking and cycling routes will link the station with the town centre and with local amenities and residential areas. The urban realm around the station will be developed with pedestrians in mind, and secure bicycle storage will be provided in the form of a Cycle Hub.

Park & Ride

Provision of park and ride facilities will result in less car journeys into the regional centre, with resulting benefits from less congestion and pollution, especially in peak periods.

Bus

A bus interchange would allow seamless connections between rail and bus, allowing more parts of Walkden station’s catchment area to be linked directly to the station by bus. A site directly opposite the station currently in use as a car wash would be used to facilitate this.

Heavy rail

Incremental development with longer trains and regular reviews of service patterns and destinations plus electrification – this mode will provide the core service at Walkden, providing direct links to areas of Merseyside, Lancashire and Yorkshire along with fast services into the regional centre and to Wigan. As electrification schemes progress in future control periods, accelerated services with electric trains will release further capacity to allow additional services to operate.

Rapid Transit

We have carefully considered the role of Metrolink and tram-train modes. We firmly believe that these have an important role to play but this should be complementary to heavy rail and not in place of it. We strongly disagree with the concept of replacing heavy rail on the Walkden line on a “like for like” basis with tram-trains for a number of reasons. This line is not a branch line – it was built to main line standards and the introduction of faster, more frequent trains serving new destinations reflects its intended role. It is also an important diversionary route as has been proven regularly during work on the Bolton line. In order to fulfil its potential the line must be electrified to main line standards and while in theory tram-trains could run on a dual voltage system, they would be restricted to the local area and lead to the potential loss of through services to Southport, Leeds and other current and potential destinations. We consider this lacks ambition, and would be a wasted opportunity to deliver a transformational uplift in transport provision. We would also oppose our local stations being downgraded to unstaffed halts as this runs completely counter to what we are trying to achieve.

We note TfGM’s ambition for a city centre tunnel with great interest, and see an opportunity for this to run from Piccadilly through the city centre to a portal just west of the current Salford Crescent station. This would be a rapid transit route, running along the former fast lines to Walkden from where a branch would take the formation of the former heavy rail route through Little Hulton via Bolton Hospital and then on-street via the Burnden retail area to Bolton Interchange. Much of the route of this line would benefit hugely from regeneration as a result, and that is the primary role of light rail. A further possibility is to continue light rail alongside the heavy rail tracks as far as Hag Fold then from there to Leigh (potentially partly on-street) and along the former Bickershaw branch to Wigan. Under this scheme, some of the most lightly used current stations, such as Moorside and Hag Fold could receive frequent light rail services and new light rail stops can be built, while the resulting faster heavy rail services serving the Walkden and Atherton interchanges will release additional capacity to further increase frequencies in the future.

We recognise that high costs will be associated with these proposals but the original proposal has a poor business case and lacks the ambition to deliver much benefit over the improved heavy rail service that will soon be in place. We can do so much better.

Conclusion

FoWS very much share TfGM’s ambitions and aspirations for the future of transport in our leading city region. It is vitally important that we maximise the potential of our railways or these ambitions will not be met.

Our ideas and proposals are all about connectivity, modal shift, regeneration, economic development, transforming the quality of life for the area’s residents, and the travel experience of visitors.

We look to an exciting future as we work closely with TfGM and our communities to turn this vision into reality.

Andy Barlow – Chair, FoWS, ADBarlow@aol.com
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