

1. Monday to Saturday daytime services

Currently Walkden station is provided with a half hourly service in each direction on Mondays to Saturdays during the day. All services serve Manchester Victoria. FOWS would like to see services provided to Manchester Piccadilly and, if possible, to Manchester Airport. This is what we suggest:-

We understand that Northern are considering rerouting the current Blackpool North to Buxton service to serve Manchester Victoria instead of Piccadilly. Currently the xx05 (or approximate) services from Walkden to Victoria connect into the Buxton service at Salford Crescent, but the connection is tight (for example arrival at Salford Crescent at 0921, Buxton service timed from Salford Crescent at 0925). If the paths were to be reversed, then the current Walkden to Victoria service could instead serve Deansgate, Oxford Road and Piccadilly, connecting at Salford Crescent to the Blackpool North-Victoria service (which ideally would be a few minutes later) as paths into Victoria are likely to be less restricted than Piccadilly). The service could then take the path of the Buxton train as far as Slade Lane junction and then (subject to pathing at Slade Lane) continue on to Manchester Airport. Capacity will exist at the Airport from December when the third platform opens at that station. The other daytime service from Walkden (xx35) would continue to serve Victoria as at present.

Market and Revenue Opportunities

Victoria Station is ideal for commuters and handy for shoppers, but the opportunities to connect into longer distance services is very limited. Connections at Salford Crescent are currently very poor, leading to long delays at times when trying to reach Piccadilly. Furthermore, through tickets are not valid on Metrolink services from Victoria to Piccadilly. By diverting one train per hour from Walkden to Piccadilly, FOWS believes that new market opportunities will open up for passengers either travelling to the catchment areas of Deansgate, Oxford Road and Piccadilly (for example students) and more importantly passengers connecting at Piccadilly who might currently be put off by long waiting times at Salford Crescent and the inconvenience of changing trains more than once when travelling with luggage etc. These passengers may currently travel to Piccadilly by car or by taxi, or may drive to their destination without using rail at all. We believe there is a much larger potential outbound market from Walkden and other local stations to destinations such as London than the reverse, and therefore the fares collected would be at local stations by Northern, thus increasing revenues beyond just local destinations.

By extending trains to Manchester Airport further markets will open up with air passengers and airport workers also using rail services rather than the highly congested M60. This too would result in more fares collected by Northern. Currently services from the Airport to Southport operate via Bolton and Wigan. Bolton is already served by Trans Pennine Express trains, which are likely to be preferred by passengers to suburban DMUs such as class 142s, while the Walkden line has no airport service at all. By diverting these services via Walkden more stations can be served (there being only one between Bolton and Wigan not served by this line) and hence running the Southport-Airport service via Bolton represents a large missed opportunity for revenue generation (there being no competition on the Walkden route with other TOCs).

It is understood that some Victoria services continue beyond Victoria on to the Oldham loop and that diverting an hourly train to Piccadilly may create an issue there. However alternative trains could be extended instead, and in any case the Oldham loop will shortly close for Metrolink conversion which means this service pattern will no longer be needed.

2. Monday to Friday peak hour services

One of the biggest problems faced by Walkden customers is a severe lack of peak hour capacity into Manchester along with acute overcrowding on existing services. A solution to this has already been identified – the extension of the usable platform length at Walkden to allow four

carriage trains to call, which will allow the peak hour "Atherton expresses" to call additionally at Walkden providing desperately needed capacity. Currently growth in peak hour usage is stifled and FOWS firmly believes that the modest investment required to upgrade the platform will be quickly rewarded with revenue growth as passengers discover that extra trains with more seats are available. These extra trains serve Salford Central and Victoria, which is ideal because these stations are the best option for most Manchester commuters – as outlined above.

3. Evening services

Current service patterns provide an hourly evening service from Victoria to Walkden. This has its benefits due to the close proximity of Victoria to Manchester's attractions such as the MEN Arena, Manchester Arndale and developments such as the Printworks. Consequently evening services can become very full indeed at times and often need strengthening to four carriages. The downside to the current pattern is again the connections at Salford Crescent. Longer distance passengers coming into Piccadilly are offered a departure at xx11 (Blackpool North) to Salford Crescent which allows around four minutes to connect to the hourly Walkden service (except the 2234 from Victoria which means a wait of around 20 minutes !). Any problems between Piccadilly and Deansgate lead to missed connections, for example any delay to the preceding xx07 Liverpool Lime Street service at Piccadilly through to Castlefield junction or the pathing of intermodal trains bound for Trafford Park, which are quite frequent in the evenings. To resolve this, trains should depart from Victoria to allow 10 minutes for connections at Salford Crescent from the xx11 out of Piccadilly: paths during the evening can't be under too much pressure out of Victoria.

Of course any additional services in the evenings, especially from Piccadilly, would be greatly welcomed by FOWS.

4. Sunday services

Currently Walkden station (and the other stations on this line) are not provided with a Sunday service. FOWS believe that there is a substantial market for Sunday trains as society has changed greatly over recent years and Sunday shopping in particular now represents a good revenue opportunity for rail travel into Manchester, and to a lesser extent into Wigan. We would advocate an hourly Sunday service initially (again with good connections in each direction at Salford Crescent to serve Piccadilly and beyond, bearing in mind that Sunday is a peak day for long distance leisure travel). We would also like to see this service run through to Southport, at least during the Summer timetable, as this is a popular destination on Sundays for leisure travellers and has great potential for modal switch from the car. This will help to even out load factors on the trains in both directions, towards Manchester and towards Wigan and Southport.

In addition, a Saturday service has been provided to Blackpool from Walkden in recent years on Summer Saturdays. FOWS suggest this train should also operate during the Blackpool Illuminations when demand for travel to Blackpool is at its absolute peak.

Summary

FOWS firmly believes that these service improvements can be delivered with the bare minimum of additional cost and without the need for additional trains (apart from strengthening existing services to four carriages as more units become available). It is not just a wish list, and we are not asking for direct trains to Glasgow or London, just better utilisation of existing resources with some imaginative responses to current travel demand. FOWS believe that it is not just the users of Walkden station who stand to benefit, but that Northern too will benefit greatly from additional revenues that would be generated, especially with some modest promotion of the services.