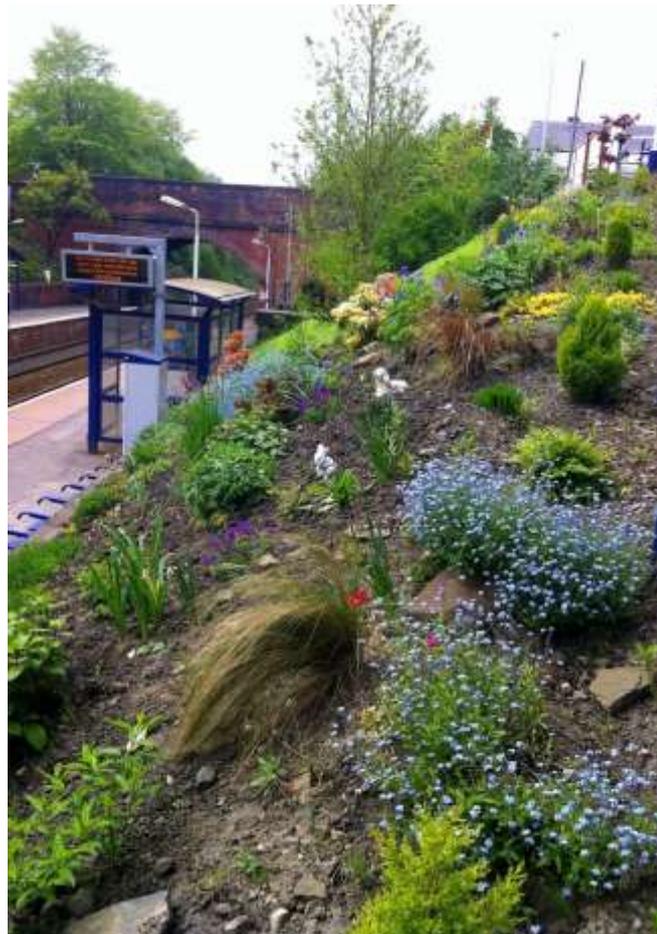


North West Manchester Station Friends' Alliance



Response to Stakeholder Consultation Northern Rail Franchise July 2014

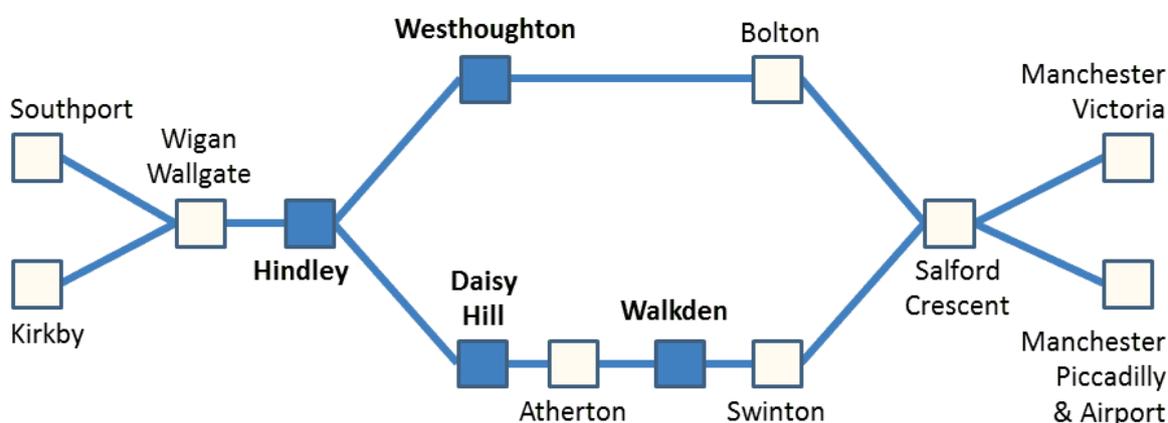


Foreword

This document has been prepared by the North West Manchester Station Friends' Alliance in response to the Department for Transport Rail Executive and Rail North's stakeholder consultation into the new Northern Rail franchise scheduled to begin in February 2016. We have sought to address the questions posed by the consultation document with regard to Northern Rail services in our area, whilst also putting forward our suggestions as to how the new franchise can meet the objectives set out for it by the Secretary of State and Rail North.

Our organisation is an alliance of Station Friends' groups located on the Manchester-Wigan and Bolton-Wigan corridors. Constituent members are:

- **Friends of Walkden station**, located between Manchester and Wigan on the Atherton Line;
- **Friends of Hindley station**, located on both the Atherton Line and Bolton-Wigan line;
- **Friends of Westhoughton station**, located between Wigan and Bolton;
- **Friends of Daisy Hill station**, also on the Atherton line.



The alliance was established in January 2014 with a view to strengthening constructive engagement between our groups and other stakeholders, such as Northern Rail, TfGM, Network Rail and local authorities. We are volunteers, working with our local communities to improve our station environments and to actively promote rail service developments in our area. This document is an example of that engagement process. The individual Friends' groups are well established and have won a number of awards.

As our services are exclusively provided by Northern Rail, we will not specifically comment on refranchising plans for Trans Pennine Express within this response, however where we feel that synergies can be made between the two franchises, for example by improving connections between services, we will note this accordingly.

Rail services – the current franchise

At present all services serving our stations are operated by diesel multiple units. The Atherton Line is served by trains from Manchester Victoria (and points east of Victoria in some cases) to Wigan Wallgate and on to Southport or Kirkby. The Bolton to Wigan line is also served by through trains from Southport to Manchester Airport, these trains call at

Westhoughton and Hindley. On Sundays a limited service operates on the Atherton Line (from around 0915 until 1830) and this is currently locally funded. Many peak services suffer from overcrowding, and this has become an increasing problem at weekends as well, in particular during the pre-Christmas period when instances of denied boarding are commonplace. Rail usage at the stations we represent has experienced rapid growth in recent years and we aim to build on this success.



Off-Peak Overcrowding: *Rapidly increasing passenger growth has led to overcrowding even on non-peak services as this view of Walkden station on the morning of Saturday 23rd November 2013 demonstrates.*

In December 2013 it was announced that the Bolton to Wigan line will be electrified by 2017 as part of the wider North West Electrification Programme. This will bring significant benefits to this line, however the Atherton Line is not currently included in these plans and this is a matter of concern to us. The elimination of diesel operation on busy urban railways is key to reducing long term costs as well as providing faster, more reliable and sustainable rail services. We strongly support the electrification of the Atherton Line at the earliest possible opportunity.

Franchise Objectives – making the vision a reality

We share the vision of Rail Executive and Rail North of developing a network of good quality rail services which is fit for purpose and reflects real demand and growth potential. We also understand that these services must be affordable, and hence we seek to promote a virtuous circle of service improvements that lead to increasing revenue and declining costs which we would wish to see reinvested in further improvements. We want to see more frequent and reliable services operated by modern electric trains, and a service pattern that reflects demand, seven days a week. We warmly welcome the commitment to support communities to help deliver local transport integration, local regeneration, and investment at and around stations, and as just such a community group we very much look forward to playing an active part in this process.

We agree that the new franchise should be transformational in its nature. The growth in passenger numbers across our area has been achieved despite very little growth in capacity and no improvement in the quality of rolling stock provided. To unlock the potential of these services, a step change is needed in the areas of rolling stock provision, ticketing,

revenue protection and timetabling, all of which will contribute towards making the vision set out in the consultation document a reality.

Responses to Consultation Questions

We now set out our responses to the questions contained in Annex A of the consultation document, with the exception of those questions which relate solely to Trans Pennine Express. Our views relate to the area covered by our Group, and how this interacts with the wider Northern franchise.

TO1: What are your views on increasing below average fares over time to levels typical on the rest of the network in order to improve the frequency, capacity and quality of local services? Do you have any evidence to support your views?

It will be very important to ensure that real improvements to services, rolling stock and capacity are in place and established before this is considered. In recent years annual fare increases have been accompanied by increasing overcrowding and no improvement in the quality of rolling stock provided, hence there is some way to go before the standard of product offered genuinely merits increases in the real cost of fares. Where we describe the rest of the network, the quality of product offered in most parts of London and the South East is so far ahead of that offered in most parts of the North that it is unrealistic to suggest that this gap can be completely closed in the currency of the next Northern franchise. To increase fare levels to match those in the South East, or even approaching them, could have very negative consequences for several reasons. Rail needs to act as a catalyst for increasing prosperity and regeneration in the North. Transformational changes to rail services will be an enabler of economic growth, leading to greater prosperity and less social deprivation, but these need to be delivered first in order to generate the conditions that would be needed to allow real increases in fare levels to be implemented. Otherwise, those passengers who stand to benefit most from greater social mobility could be priced off the railway and be unable to take advantage of better access to education and employment afforded by improved services, and the reduced opportunity for modal shift will also have potentially negative impacts on the wider economy in terms of lower reductions in road congestion and emission levels. The best way of ensuring that improving the frequency, capacity and quality of local services is achieved in an affordable way is to encourage organic growth, increasing passenger numbers and hence fare revenue, protecting that revenue from evasion, and hence lowering costs on the network. More investment now will lead to these goals being achieved more quickly and the burden on the taxpayer being reduced more quickly.

TO2: What are your views on giving priority to improving the quality of the Northern rolling stock at the expense of some reduction in lightly used services (e.g. fewer calls at low use stations)? Do you have any evidence to support your views?

Station usage should not be the only criterion used here, the growth potential and actual development of passenger usage over recent years must be taken into account. The lowest used station in our area, Ince, has seen passenger growth of 77.7% since 2007-8, and the second lowest, Moorside, has experienced growth of 72.92% (source: Office of Rail regulation station usage data 2007-8 and 2012-13). This proves that demand is strong and is being held back by a lack of more frequent services. All other stations in the area which we represent have annual usage well into six figures. The new Northern franchise should seek to build on this success and to capitalise on this growth potential. The busiest stations on

our lines need additional capacity, especially at peak times, but the evidence is clear that this should not be at the expense of less busy but still fast growing smaller stations.

TO3: *What are your views on allowing some reduction in the hours ticket offices are open and staffed if this is accompanied by the ability for passengers to have widespread access to ticket buying opportunities (e.g. through new and improved approaches such as smart ticketing, increased advance purchase ticketing or via mobile 'phones), adequate measures to ensure vulnerable passengers are not disadvantaged and more effective customer service by both station and on-train staff? Do you have any evidence to support your views?*

Again, this is a simplified point of view and needs a more holistic approach. The key is the potential for stations to fulfil their true potential as a focal point not just for ticket retailing but also as community hubs that produce added value. The evidence is fairly local to us, the "M to Go" concept used by Merseytravel demonstrates that ticket retailing can be just one function that could be provided by a more diversified retail concept. Ticket offices at busy stations have the potential to be transformed into retail units providing products that are in demand from passengers, such as drinks and snacks, books and magazines and more. The revenue generated can then offset any revenue decline that may arise from a structural shift towards smart ticketing methods, while still providing a traditional ticket retailing service for those who require or prefer this. MerseyRail reported a 12% in customer satisfaction with ticket-buying facilities and a 22% increase in satisfaction with station services and facilities in the 6 years following the introduction of the first "M to go" store¹. The presence of staff at stations is important to passengers, particularly at times of disruption, and especially for those needing assistance or perhaps unfamiliar with online and mobile options. We must bear in mind that we have an ageing population, and also not everybody has access to this technology, particularly in more deprived areas where the use of rail as an enabler of social mobility is so important.

Where stations are currently unstaffed, ticket retailing can be franchised to local retail outlets in the near vicinity thus providing opportunities to generate incremental revenue while improving customer service and reducing ticketless travel.

It is particularly important to ensure that a staff presence remains at busy stations and that this covers as much of the operating day as reasonably practicable. On London Overground, where all stations are staffed whenever trains are running, passenger satisfaction levels have soared, and are well above both local averages for that region and national averages, accompanied by investment in rolling stock and stations. There is no reason why this can't be replicated in the North's vibrant city regions.

COM1: *How can local communities, local businesses and other organisations be further stimulated to play an active part in the running of Northern and TPE rail services, including at stations?*

¹¹ Source: MerseyRail evidence to House of Commons Transport Committee - Rail 2020 on 31/8/2012. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmtran/329/329we31.htm>

This is key to us as a voluntary organisation as we are actively engaged with our local communities to raise awareness of the stations and services that we represent, and to promote them as key community assets. To do this we rely on the relationships that we enjoy with Northern Rail, local transport bodies and local authorities, British Transport Police and others. We have achieved a great deal but want to achieve much more, and we would like to see community engagement and support with organisations like ourselves emphasised as a key requirement of the new franchise. The availability of funding for small schemes at stations such as art and gardening projects for example, can enable greater community involvement and a sense of pride in stations. This creates a virtuous circle of better awareness of the facilities on offer, a more attractive station environment, less vandalism and greater usage leading to increased revenues.

Engagement between the franchisee and local businesses could allow sponsorship of specific projects, establishment of community funding pots, promotion of community rail activities and events, targeted travel offers and rail user discounts.

COM2: What opportunities are there for Community Rail Partnerships to expand their role and range of activities?

Our area is not currently covered by a Community Rail Partnership. Lines such as ours which are intensively used urban networks would not fit the template of a CRP in a rural area, however we do see the potential for sharing of best practice with CRPs particularly with regard to projects at stations. As members of ACORP we welcome any increases in support that can be cascaded throughout the community rail movement.

TPF1: Are you aware of any proposals for third-party funded changes not already indicated? Please provide details.

In May 2010 a Sunday service was established on the Atherton Line using funding from local sources. This has been a great success with passenger numbers and revenues exceeding expectations, and in some cases, especially in the run up to Christmas, train formations have already needed to be strengthened to accommodate demand. It is of paramount importance to us that the service is included in the base specification for the new Northern franchise, not just within its current operational hours, but with an earlier start to allow access to employment for those working on Sundays in Manchester, Wigan and other locations, and a late finish to capitalise on Manchester's burgeoning evening economy and to allow connections from long distance journeys where Sunday evenings are a peak time.

Do you fancy something to eat or drink while waiting for the train ?

We don't have a buffet at Walkden station, but FOWS have teamed up with our local cafes to offer some great **Rail User Discounts !**



Just show a rail ticket or pass for today's date for a discount on all hot drinks in **Foxy's** or **Café Chino**.

Across the road **Café Relish** give station users 10% off the regular menu price for all food and drink (special offers excepted).

Save money – and support your local businesses !

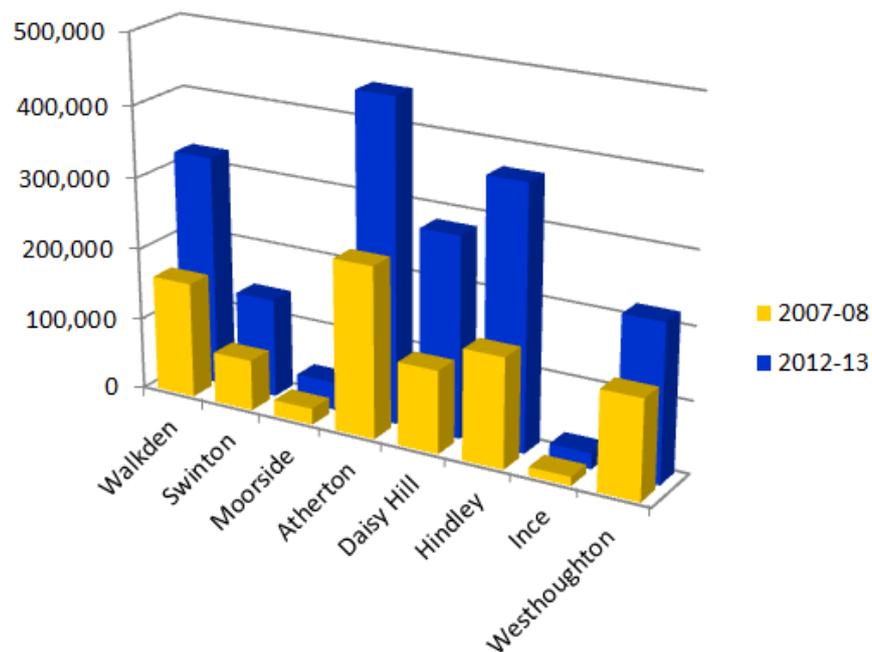


FOWS have aligned with local cafes to offer discounts to rail passengers while helping promote local businesses and raising awareness of the railway service.

FID1: What factors may impact on demand for travel on the new Northern and TPE franchises? Please provide evidence.

Demand for travel on Northern Rail services in our area has been an unqualified success story. This has been achieved despite the severe economic downturn and the very limited increases in capacity and lack of new rolling stock. Factors include the increasing numbers of passengers using rail services to access education (the regional centre, Manchester, has the largest single site University campus in the UK, plus the University of Salford and several major colleges located on our lines of route), the increasing concentration of employment in Manchester and opportunities for retail and leisure activities. New residential development in our area will stimulate additional demand, with increasing road congestion and slowing journey times by car and bus, as will a shift towards more sustainable modes of transport such as rail. Improved rolling stock with wi-fi and expanded services will lead to further increases in demand, as will improved connections with longer distance trains.

Evidence of this strong passenger growth is provided by the following ORR station usage data comparing 2007-8 with 2012-13 for all stations in our area:-



Station	2007-08	2012-13	Increase
Walkden	162,130	322,590	98.97%
Swinton	71,171	138,058	93.98%
Moorside	22,373	38,688	72.92%
Atherton	239,276	448,934	87.62%
Daisy Hill	115,652	279,782	141.92%
Hindley	153,403	365,912	138.53%
Ince	12,493	22,200	77.7%
Westhoughton	138,683	217,910	57.13%

Notable are the particularly large percentage increases experienced by the busier stations in our area. The lower figure for Westhoughton may be partially explained by the fact this is the only station that did not benefit from the introduction of Sunday services to the Atherton line (as this station is not on that line), providing further evidence of the outstanding success of this service as mentioned in our response to question TPF1 above.

Case Study – Passenger usage growth at Walkden Station

Friends of Walkden Station conduct annual surveys of passenger usage and this data is reproduced here as a detailed example of growth trends experienced by our stations:-



Total passengers boarding and alighting at Walkden during weekday mornings. Source: FOWS Annual Passenger Surveys 2007-2013. Figures show all passengers counted on/off trains on a mid-November Thursday morning each year. See <http://www.walkdenstation.org.uk/passengerNumbers.shtml> for more details.

DTD1: What are your proposals for providing passengers better and safer access to different modes of transport at stations (including bus, tram, cycling and walking?)

This requires strong co-operation between stakeholders – in our case engagement between Rail North, Transport for Greater Manchester, the successful Northern franchise bidder and local authorities. Private bus operators need to be incentivised to provide connections with rail services and where necessary support may be needed to provide such integration at certain times where commercial services may not be as viable. Local authorities need to be proactive in producing improvement plans for station footprints, protecting potential improvement schemes such as car parks through the planning process and identifying funding for such developments. Cycling must be encouraged wherever possible, chiefly by provision of good quality cycle storage facilities at stations and increased provision for cycle carriage on the trains themselves. Improved signage and wayfinding around stations will encourage more rail users to access them on foot, along with detailed attention to pedestrian safety and access to the stations themselves. Integrated ticketing products (enabled by smart card technology) can encourage intermodal journeys by public transport as opposed to the use of cars to reach stations. However it must be highlighted that driving to a local station and then using rail is better than using a car for the whole journey, and investment does need to be made in providing car parking where possible for stations that lack this (such as Walkden) or those that need improved provision (such as Hindley).

DTD2: How do you suggest your proposals to improve the door-to-door journey experience might be funded?

Access to sources of funding such as the Local Sustainable Transport Fund is important to facilitate better door to door sustainable journeys. There could be opportunities to leverage funding from business sponsorship of improvements (both within and outside the rail industry) for small scale schemes- see response COM1, but for larger schemes this will again be reliant on engagement between the relevant bodies to minimise costs by co-ordinating projects such as highway schemes around stations with access improvements. Additionally, funding can be leveraged through the planning process with such funding from developments within a station's catchment area provided for improvements.

NTSR1: Please indicate, with evidence where available, where passengers would be better served, and revenue increased, by:-

Reducing the number of calls at low use stations?

Please refer to response TO2 above

Increasing frequencies on busier sections of routes or at busier times?

There are differing characteristics between our two lines (Bolton to Wigan and the Atherton Line) which provide services into the regional centre. The Bolton to Wigan line will see significant improvements with the introduction of longer electric units, while the Atherton Line is currently planned to remain diesel operated, though we are pushing for this line to be included in future electrification schemes. Despite the large percentage growth in passenger numbers, rail's market share remains relatively low on this corridor and there is significant potential to grow this. A combination of reduced journey times and increased capacity (by lengthening trains) would make a significant difference in the peaks, while the minimum off peak frequency should be increased to closer to that offered in the peaks, with half hourly frequencies in the evenings and an all day service on Sundays. Provision of four trains per hour with an average speed of 30mph will improve the generalised journey time from all of our stations into Manchester by 10-15 minutes (with significant benefits for journeys to Wigan and other destinations). This will significantly improve access to employment from deprived areas and improve productivity and regeneration. Evidence – Network Rail's Regional Urban Market Study, October 2013, pages 162-163.

Speeding up the service for longer distance passengers?

We believe that with electrification and by taking full advantage of recent track and signalling improvements, services can be speeded up for all passengers (see above). Longer distance passengers from stations in the Southport area will further benefit from these increases in speed as these services tend to omit smaller stations.

Improving connections with other services where there is evident demand?

A significant gap exists in the lack of through services from the Atherton Line to Manchester Oxford Road, Piccadilly and Manchester Airport, which acts as a barrier to access these very important areas of education and employment opportunities. Northern Hub will increase capacity and although constraints will still exist, we request that careful studies are made to see if this can be rectified without negative impact on the Bolton line. One suggestion would be to route the existing diesel operated Southport-Manchester Airport service via Atherton, providing an additional semi-fast service as mentioned above, replacing this with additional electric services through Bolton and Westhoughton. At the very least, connections at Salford Crescent to and from the Atherton Line should be optimised, at present waits of around 18 minutes are commonplace, and there is no direct public transport service by any mode to

Manchester Airport from significant towns such as Walkden and Atherton. This is not an acceptable situation.

Connections to London and other long distance services are also compromised by the lack of through services to Piccadilly. While connections to London, Birmingham and Scotland can be made at Wigan, this usually involves a change of stations as well as trains and this has a negative impact on demand and potential revenues. Northern Hub will bring additional opportunities for connecting journeys from Manchester Victoria onto TPE services, we very much welcome this but care must be taken to ensure maximum integration of schedules to minimise connection times.

Adjusting train services to meet seasonal changes in demand?

Our services are generally always busy but become overcrowded at times, sometimes to the point of denied boarding, particularly in the run up to Christmas and when major events are taking place in Manchester. This requires better planning to ensure that, once constraints on availability of rolling stock ease with electrification, services are planned to provide adequate capacity at these times. Services should be formed of a minimum of four coaches, including late evening services leaving Manchester after concerts and sporting events.

Adjusting the time of the first/last train?

We are increasingly living in a 24 hour society and the demand for early and late trains has grown significantly. We must ensure that trains operate early and late enough to provide access to employment and leisure opportunities. Specifically, as previously mentioned, the new Northern franchise must include a full Sunday service on the Atherton Line in order to fulfil this requirement.

NTSR2: Please set out, with evidence where available, any other approaches that might improve route utilisation and make better use of existing resources on the Northern franchise.

Electrification is the key to this aspiration. While we acknowledge that this is primarily a matter for the Electrification Task Force, with whom we will engage, a brief summary of our proposal is as follows:-

Phase 1: Crow Nest Junction to Salford Crescent (the Atherton Line) allowing some peak services, and evening and Sunday services as per current arrangements to transition to electric operation, plus the provision of an important electrified diversionary route

Phase 2: Wigan to Southport. This will allow replacement of all diesel stock on this corridor.

Phase 3: Wigan to Kirkby. This can be done either as an extension of the third rail system from Kirkby or using OLE with dual voltage EMUs (such as class 319s) allowing through services to operate to Liverpool.

Electrification of urban networks is best done as a rolling programme, avoiding the creation of islands of diesel operation (for example Gospel Oak to Barking). This approach is being used for the Thames Valley and Cardiff Valleys services. It will lead to significant long term cost savings in terms of leasing and maintenance costs, crew compatibility and fuel along with environmental benefits, speed improvements and less track wear. We would like to see Phase 1 delivered in Control Period 5, following on from Bolton-Wigan, and Phases 2 and 3 as early as possible in Control Period 6.

NTSR3: Please indicate, with evidence where available, where services should be improved on weekends, resources permitting.

As mentioned previously, the key requirement is the inclusion in the baseline specification of an all day Sunday service on the Atherton Line. Saturday evening services should be increased in frequency to reflect growing demand, and trains lengthened on daytime

services where required, especially in the run up to Christmas and on days where major events are taking place. Services via Westhoughton should be operated by four carriage diesel units at these times prior to their replacement by similar EMUs in 2016.

Usage of weekend services, and off peak services generally, can be further stimulated by pricing offers and greater promotion of destinations easily accessible by rail. Likewise the provision of more through services to destinations such as Southport and Blackpool at weekends, especially on Sundays, would produce significant increases in off peak revenues particularly in the summer.

NTSR4: *Please indicate, with evidence where available, where weekend services provide poor value for money for the subsidy required to operate them.*

We have no evidence to suggest that this is the case with any of the weekend services provided on the Atherton Line or Wigan to Manchester via Bolton line, and as we have indicated above, we need more capacity to meet demand, and see these services as a key driver in increasing rail usage and passenger revenues.

NTSR5: *What are your views on retaining the route from Cleethorpes and Grimsby to Barton-on-Humber within the Northern franchise? What evidence do you have to support your views?*

This line is well outside our area and hence we have no specific views on this subject.

OTH1: *Do you have any other views on the future of the Northern and TPE franchises that you would like to set out?*

Retention of the two businesses as separate franchises allows each to concentrate on the different needs of the types of services that they will operate. It is important to us that Northern are particularly focused on local services and stations, and in engagement with the communities that they serve. The proposals to transfer some elements of the TPE network to Northern may make operational sense, particularly with the understandable aim of maximising benefits from electrification, but Northern could lose some of their focus on local services if they are expected to replace elements of the TPE network where passengers may expect a different product and approach. Care needs to be taken with this.

One other main area of concern is revenue protection. If the revenue lost from passengers travelling without tickets was to be taken into account, we are sure that the subsidy profile required by Northern would look quite different. On the one hand, widespread introduction of smartcards should lessen this problem, but on the other hand proposals to introduce driver only operation would put the emphasis on off-train revenue protection checks, and these need to be properly resourced. This also emphasises the need to have a staff presence where possible on stations, not just to sell tickets but to look out for fare evasion (not something a ticket machine can do).

Quality of rolling stock is vitally important. We are well aware that new and refurbished stock does not come cheaply, but it is so integral to the product offering that we must make that investment if we are to reap the longer term rewards. Any franchise specification needs to dispense with the Pacer units (and possibly the class 150s), with refurbishment of later build diesel units to a high standard as part of their PRM-TSI modifications and the procurement of high quality electric rolling stock. Full accessibility and other modern features such as controlled emission toilets must be universal, with increased provision for carriage of luggage and cycles.

Disabled access at stations is another important consideration. Some very busy stations on Northern's network lack this, and have not been included in recent Access for All funding decisions. This includes stations in our area, and we would like to see investment in these facilities included in the requirements of the new franchise.

Conclusion

We strongly agree with Rail Executive and Rail North that the new Northern franchise must be transformational, a step change in service provision and product quality. To this end, the franchisee should be incentivised to achieve the best possible outcomes to deliver a rail service befitting the North's vibrant economy. We firmly believe that the way to revenue growth and cost reduction is through investment, innovation and engagement, and it will be very important to resist the temptation to make short term cost savings via cuts to service quality as this will have negative long term consequences. Passenger usage on Northern has grown by 47% during the current franchise, and we have demonstrated in our evidence (see response FID1 above) that growth at our stations has been substantially higher, and we believe could grow considerably more.

Our Alliance of voluntary groups will continue to play our part in the future of rail in our region, and we trust that our response will be well received as a useful contribution to this franchise consultation.

Andy Barlow

Report Author and Chair, Friends of Walkden Station

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Co-Signatories

Sheila Davidson Friends of Hindley Station

Stephen Freeborn Friends of Westhoughton Station

Councillor Jack Speight Friends of Daisy Hill Station

Cover Pictures

Front page, top and bottom left:
Walkden Station

Front page, bottom right: A floral
embankment at Westhoughton Station

This page, right: Daisy Hill station

This page, below: The Friends of
Hindley Station have won many
national and regional awards for their
restoration of the station gardens.

