

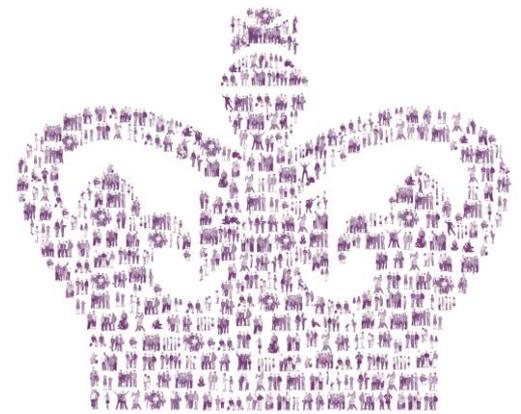


SALFORD RAIL STRATEGY

Friends of Walkden Station

Consultation Response

April 2017



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

The MBE for volunteer groups

F:WS

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. One of our most important priorities in seeking to achieve this is to work closely with local stakeholders, and Salford City Council is a key partner in this respect. We therefore strongly support the work that the Council is carrying out to establish a rail strategy for the city. The Salford Rail Strategy supports the work that our group and other similar groups in the city are carrying out, both in terms of practical improvements to stations and in our work to lobby for service improvements. By working together, we can achieve better outcomes for the people of Salford.

Overview

There are a number of significant changes taking place that are influencing the development of rail policy, nationally, regionally and locally. The introduction of the new Northern rail franchise will deliver some welcome improvements for Salford however this should be just the first step in the establishment of a rail service that will meet expectations for the 21st century. The establishment of Transport for the North, and the wider devolution agenda, present an opportunity for transformational change which we must grasp. All of this takes place in an environment where funding is under pressure and likely to become increasingly so. It will be very important to ensure that we work together to deliver improvements that make a real difference, are sustainable and cost effective, while ensuring that we continue to press for the longer term transformational projects that will deliver our vision for the future.

Many of the longer term strategic plans and aspirations for the future of the rail network in our wider region and across the North of England are discussed in our responses to the recent TfGM 2040 Transport Strategy and the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework, both available on our website¹. Our response to the Salford Rail Strategy consultation will concentrate on the role that Walkden station can play in Salford's future transport network and how this can be achieved.

Service Developments

There are some significant improvements committed for Walkden and the Atherton Line as part of the new Northern franchise specification. These were originally committed for introduction in December 2017, however some are now delayed to May 2018. The much needed improvements to Sunday services will be delivered in December 2017 as planned, with half hourly services through most of the day (hourly in the evenings). This shows what can be achieved, given that until 2010 there was no Sunday service at all. The existing limited Sunday service has been well supported and has delivered results over and above

¹ Please see <http://www.walkdenstation.org.uk/FOWSpublications.shtml>

those originally forecasted, and provides strong evidence to funders that improvements to our services represent excellent value for money.

From May 2018, Walkden will see many improvements to weekday services, with additional off-peak frequencies and through services to new destinations. These services will be operated by fully refurbished trains and in some cases by higher quality rolling stock. They will offer more journey options for our passengers and will make rail more competitive against the car, as well as offering residents without access to a car the option of accessing new destinations for work, education and leisure. While Walkden is generally thought of as a commuter station, and this will remain a key market, the growth of off-peak leisure travel will have significant benefits for the line's usage and financial performance, while helping to grow sustainable transport usage with its resultant benefits for the well-being of our city.

While we are naturally very pleased with the improvements that we will see, we must be clear that there are still some notable gaps. In particular, the Atherton line will still not be provided with any through services to Piccadilly and the south of our region, despite the very high usage of the line. There are two important short term priorities in this respect:

- Firstly, we must ensure that connections at Salford Crescent and at Victoria (and in due course at Salford Central) are optimised so that connections with Piccadilly services are as smooth as possible. This will be especially important where service frequencies are lower, such as evenings and Sundays.
- We then must put forward a strong case for the introduction of through services to Piccadilly from the December 2019 timetable change. Around this time we will have the RHS Garden Bridgwater development in place, which will increase demand for travel into Walkden from further afield and make connectivity with our city region's principal long distance station even more important. We therefore strongly endorse Salford City Council's priority number 2.

Looking towards the future, for the Atherton Line to reach its full potential it will need to be supported by infrastructure improvements and integration with other transport modes. As mentioned in the Strategy (4.6.7), line speed improvements would increase capacity, given that resignalling was carried out recently and the line was built as an express route. The future Digital Railway will dispense with lineside signals and the adoption of in cab moving block signalling will result in more trains being able to run more closely together. The key enabler of long term service improvements will be electrification. This is one of our highest longer term priorities, and we still see the potential to tag on the electrification of our line to that of the Bolton to Wigan route in Control Period 6. This will need effective lobbying and time is of the essence. Salford Priority number 1 correctly identifies this as key.

Our vision for the future of rail in Salford in the context of the wider city region is centred on our proposal for Walkden Hub concept. This would deliver a range of multi-modal transport improvements that would benefit the whole of this part of Salford, and not just those areas that currently benefit from a railway station. We see a role for light rail, which could be a transformational development for areas such as Little Hulton that lost their rail service

many years ago, but importantly we do not support the replacement of existing heavy rail services with light rail or tram-trains. There is insufficient capacity for running tram trains on street in central Manchester over and above current and committed Metrolink services, and we see very little benefit in introducing them in the medium term future. Where we see a role for light rail is to complement heavy rail by running alongside it, opening up new stops to serve existing and future demand, and forging new links such as from Walkden through to Little Hulton and Bolton using disused railway formations. The proposed new city centre tunnel from Salford Crescent through to Piccadilly would then offer a high frequency link from west Salford to Piccadilly and HS2, with connections to heavy rail and other transport modes using hubs at Walkden and Atherton².

While these developments may be some years away, we must act now to present a bold vision for what we can achieve in the future; meeting the needs of Salford and our growing city region in the 2030s and beyond. We must not allow a sub-optimal transport solution to be established that - like so often in the past - we may live to regret.

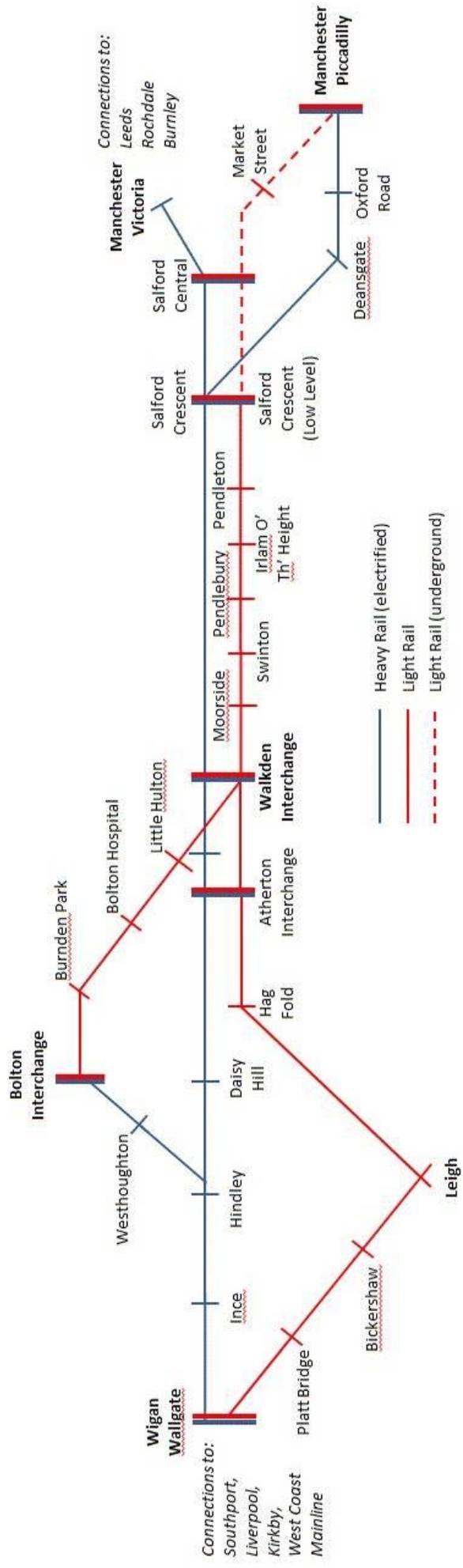
Stations in the Community

Community Rail is now enjoying a much higher profile thanks to the outstanding results that community engagement has achieved throughout the country. Friends of Walkden Station and similar groups exist primarily for this purpose – to work to achieve outputs that benefit our local communities. This is a virtuous circle, as the community feels more engaged with its station and takes pride in it, its use will increase, delivering wider benefits both in transport terms and also in health and social inclusion.

Station adoption has become established as an important method of improving stations through community engagement. The Friends' groups at Walkden and Eccles and more recently at Patricroft have achieved a great deal since their establishment, and these stations have been transformed by their work. The transformation of Irlam station through involvement of third party support is a great example of how this can potentially be taken forward through determination and adequate funding.

There are still stations in Salford that would benefit hugely from the establishment of similar groups, and FOWS is keen to work with Salford City Council to offer support for this aim. The Alliance which has been established by Friends of Walkden, Hindley, Westhoughton and Daisy Hill stations is one possible template that could be used to establish a partnership approach for all Salford stations, supporting each other and sharing best practice. A Community Rail Partnership for all Salford stations could then be established but it would be important to ensure that this takes into account Salford's particular demographic which is very different from the largely rural and under-utilised railways that inspired the establishment of the original CRPs. This is explored in paragraph 6.5 of the Strategy, and we very much endorse the proposal to take this concept further as Salford Priority number 15.

² A schematic diagram of our Walkden Hub proposal is shown on the following page.



We must view the future of Salford stations not only as railway stations but focal points for our communities. This includes improving facilities at our stations to provide better station environments, accessibility, improved access for cycling and active travel and, where possible, retail and catering facilities. This will need substantial investment.

Given that there is an unprecedented focus on Community Rail, and increased sources of funding, it is important that we grasp the opportunities this provides.

Improvements at Walkden

Looking specifically at Walkden Station, there is a pressing need to improve accessibility and this is reflected in the Strategy. Salford City Council has been strongly supportive of the need to provide car parking and cycle hub facilities at Walkden, and we are very grateful for this support. While provision of step free access at Walkden is a high priority for TfGM as well as for Salford City Council, funding is still not in place and this is a matter of urgency given rapidly increasing station usage in recent years and the potential for these trends to continue once developments outlined in the Spatial Framework start to come on stream, along with the opening of the RHS Garden Bridgewater.

We very much welcome the work that Urban Vision have been carrying out to improve the urban realm around the station, but we need to make sure that this is done in such a way as to make a real difference. In particular, the priority currently given to road traffic over pedestrians must be reversed as the current layout is unsafe, particularly at peak times, and this problem won't be solved unless pedestrian access to the station is substantially improved. We would like to see the station entrance area brightened up, with the use of lighting under the bridges and deep cleaning and restoration of the station entrance area to provide a welcoming gateway to Walkden for local residents and visitors. This will also make our station feel safer, especially at night.

As mentioned above, our longer term plans involve the station being a part of a multi-modal transport hub, with expanded facilities and improved retail and catering offers. This may allow opportunities for third party funding which should be explored.

FOWS acknowledge the excellent support that we have received from the Council, for example with our floral displays and current art installation project. We have also enjoyed strong support from local councillors which has been very welcome. We will continue to work closely with Salford City Council and our councillors to maximise opportunities for both short and long term improvements to Walkden Station (Salford Priority number 7), building on the excellent relationship that we have developed with the Council.

Looking to the Future

We must remain mindful that society is changing rapidly, especially through the advancement of new technology and new methods of communication. The rail network must evolve with it and be a part of the future solution. In the 1960s it was widely believed that rail had little future other than on the main inter-city and strongest commuter flows, and many links were lost that could have been strategically invaluable now. For example, it would be unthinkable now to remove a rail service from parts of Salford such as Worsley as happened in the past. In order to avoid these mistakes from happening again, we must be clear about the role that rail can play in a future society and not just what is needed now.

Section 8 of the Strategy explores this and we have highlighted some of the interventions above (in particular paragraphs 8.6 to 8.12 of the Strategy). Rail must remain attractive in a society where driverless cars and other technological advances have a disruptive effect on how we live, work and travel today.

Conclusion

Salford has an exciting future. It is a vibrant, growing city with huge potential. As one of the key enablers of this growth, the successful development of our transport network is vital. In order to achieve this, it will be important to identify our key priorities as a city and then present a strong and united case to decision makers, regionally and nationally.

We do believe that constructive engagement and effective lobbying can really bring results, as we have seen through the Northern franchise specification and the benefits this has brought to our services. We need to present a strong voice going forward so that the priorities outlined in the Strategy have wide political support (for example the importance of providing direct services from the Atherton Line to Piccadilly – a similar campaign to restore services to Piccadilly from Southport has substantial political backing). This also applies to longer term interventions. This is why the Salford Rail Strategy is both timely and of great importance.

Friends of Walkden Station are very pleased to support the Salford Rail Strategy, and we very much look forward to close engagement with the Council as we move forward.

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