

# Connexion

Newsletter Supplementary Issue 133

February 2015

## OPSTA

the ormskirk, preston & southport travellers' association

established 1981, affiliated with Railfuture, and Campaign For Better Transport

web site - [www.opsta.org](http://www.opsta.org)

twitter - @opsta15

Computer graphic showing modular station design as used for Burnley Manchester Rd

What does it take to build a new station?



**General Meeting at 2pm Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> March**

**with Network Rail at the Barons Social Club Burscough**

Roy Greenhalgh Customer Account Manager and Andrew Bliss Senior Strategic Planner from Network Rail have kindly agreed to attend this meeting and we aim to cover a range of topics including:

- \*\* Route Strategy \*\* Electrification \*\* Rolling Stock Development \*\***
- \*\* Track & Signalling Plans \*\* Stations \*\***

**All members and non-members are welcome to attend**

**Venue & Directions:**

The Barons, Mart Lane, Burscough, L40 0SD (01704 895809) is a few minutes walk from Burscough Bridge station, take the road to pass alongside Tesco's, then first left and it is on the right at the corner of the football ground. There is car parking.

## Chairman's Notes

As promised in the last edition here is the supplementary issue. It is much shorter than the regular edition in order to have a cost effective handout at the Preston Model Rail exhibition and other events / meetings at this time.

We have also had suggestion from passengers participating in our recent surveys that Twitter would be an effective way of getting our message out there, so now anyone can 'follow us' on **@opsta15**. *My colleagues at committee said I was already very good at twittering my way through our meetings!*

There has been more feedback from members particularly in reaction to the rolling stock article (issue 132) which stimulated a lot of constructive and informed comment; it all helps with our lobbying. Many of you will have seen that the Champion newspaper has launched its own 'get rid of the pacer campaign'.

With reference to 'batteries included', rolling stock research and development, and potential application for our lines, will be one of the key topics when Network Rail join our general meeting in March. Unconventionally, it is an afternoon meeting but there was good reason for this and hopefully some of you that can't make the evening sessions will be able to attend.

Judging by the number of very welcome suggestions for venues from members there is clearly a desire for us to keep having open meetings with guests so we will.

### **New franchise**

OPSTA has now been involved in meetings with all 3 shortlisted bidders. How much this will achieve in the short term could be debated well into the night but unless something changes, one of them will be responsible for the northern franchise from April next year. There is a strong belief in the industry that an Invitation to Tender will be issued in February while it seems that the refranchising programme has slipped 2 months in overall timeframe.

### **Northern Rail**

So with presumably 14 months left to run our network before a transfer of management, it is encouraging that Northern continues to progress initiatives and investment commitments - we should see customer information systems installed at a number of our stations this year.

Also welcome is the statement that the operator will facilitate user group discussions on timetabling and I will press on this commitment. Whether it can or will result in changes will be another matter; timetables and routes remain a major area of concern for both of our lines as reported further on.

In terms of rolling stock, we now know there will be a fleet of twenty 319 electric units (up from the original 14) which is good news but with six Class 156 Diesel units (the best class of diesel in the fleet) going to Transpennine Express it is hard to see our services benefitting any time soon from any cascade.

Although 2 car units are sometimes rostered on the Ormskirk–Preston line, Northern is unable to make this permanent with the current 'stock shortage'. We continue to press the case.

**Regards Alan Fantom**



A company photo of a refitted unit in its new Northern Rail livery. Indications are some could be in service before the May timetable change. With hired in loco hauled stock for the Cumbrian services, Northern Rail say it will provide an additional 1.5 million seats annually despite having to sub lease six 156 units to TPE.

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## Southport – Manchester

**Burscough Bridge Ticket Office** – we believe Lancashire County Council has approved the budget plan that would see the ticket office close at the end of the 15/16 financial year but the story does not end here. The local community campaign continues and a weighty petition has been sent to LCC. OPSTA raised the matter at the Community Rail Partnership meeting and it was agreed that the issue will be looked at. OPSTA will work with all parties to ensure a viable option is found.

**Travel Census** – since the full report in the last edition, our survey approach has been verified by Merseytravel researchers as sound. OPSTA continues to work closely with the Southport Rail Transport Forum (SRTF) to avert the threat of losing direct services to Bolton and stations on the Piccadilly route. The matter will be raised with the **newly appointed Head of Rail at TfGM, Amanda White**.

**Farnworth Tunnel Work** - this essential electrification-enabling work on the tunnel will take 22 weeks, commencing from **Saturday 2 May through to Sunday 4 October 2015**

A single line of track will remain open while work is carried out, restricting the level of services that can pass through the tunnel each way. Moses Gate, Farnworth, Kearsley and Clifton stations will close; Bolton station will close during weekends.

**There will be timetable and route changes, particularly at the weekends, for Southport/ Kirkby to Manchester services – look out for announcements from Northern Rail, OPSTA is stressing the need for publicity in our area.**

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## CONTACTS

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## Ormskirk - Preston

There is so much potential for this line as shown by passenger growth despite the current constraint of a solitary single car unit allocation. Moreover, Edge Hill University's impending student travel survey will surely demonstrate some of the latent and untapped demand. More will be created with the actual and planned housing developments all along the line.

While not anticipated that the new franchise specification will invite bidders to be expansive in their timetable proposals, we will keep making the point and work with the Community Rail Partnership (CRP) on seeking improvement. It is our intention to conduct another full passenger count this quarter to corroborate previous results – sadly we know some travellers have abandoned the service.

Northern Rail did look at whether the 9.34 Ormskirk departure could be reverted to a 9.17 start giving a before 10.00 arrival at Preston but reported that conflicts with intercity services prevented a track crossing path to platform 3C at the earlier time.

The findings from the full **passenger survey** are still under review by the CRP but the papers have been sent to David Jones Rail Development Mgr at Merseytravel for use by the commissioned **Burscough Demand Study**.

Ongoing observation and feedback by those of you using of this service is very informative and useful. Recently this included reports of a major drop off in **Fare Collection**; extremely disappointing and worrying because OPSTA had considered the Guards on this line to be exemplary. The matter has been brought to the operator's attention.

**Occasional Sunday trains** – OPSTA has agreed with the CRP to propose some event related Sunday workings for consideration.



### Midge Hall Today

OPSTA campaigns for stations where they are needed. With **Midge Hall** we believe with public and Local Authority support, the time is right to construct a business plan for this station to be re-opened. Proposed housing development in Moss Side will add to local demand. **Please contact us if you wish to be kept closely informed, make comment or contribute to this campaign.**

Picture courtesy of OPSTA member Jim Wareing shows the Wensleydale Railway's approach to a cost effective construction of a Halt at Northallerton West – would it be suitable or applicable here?

